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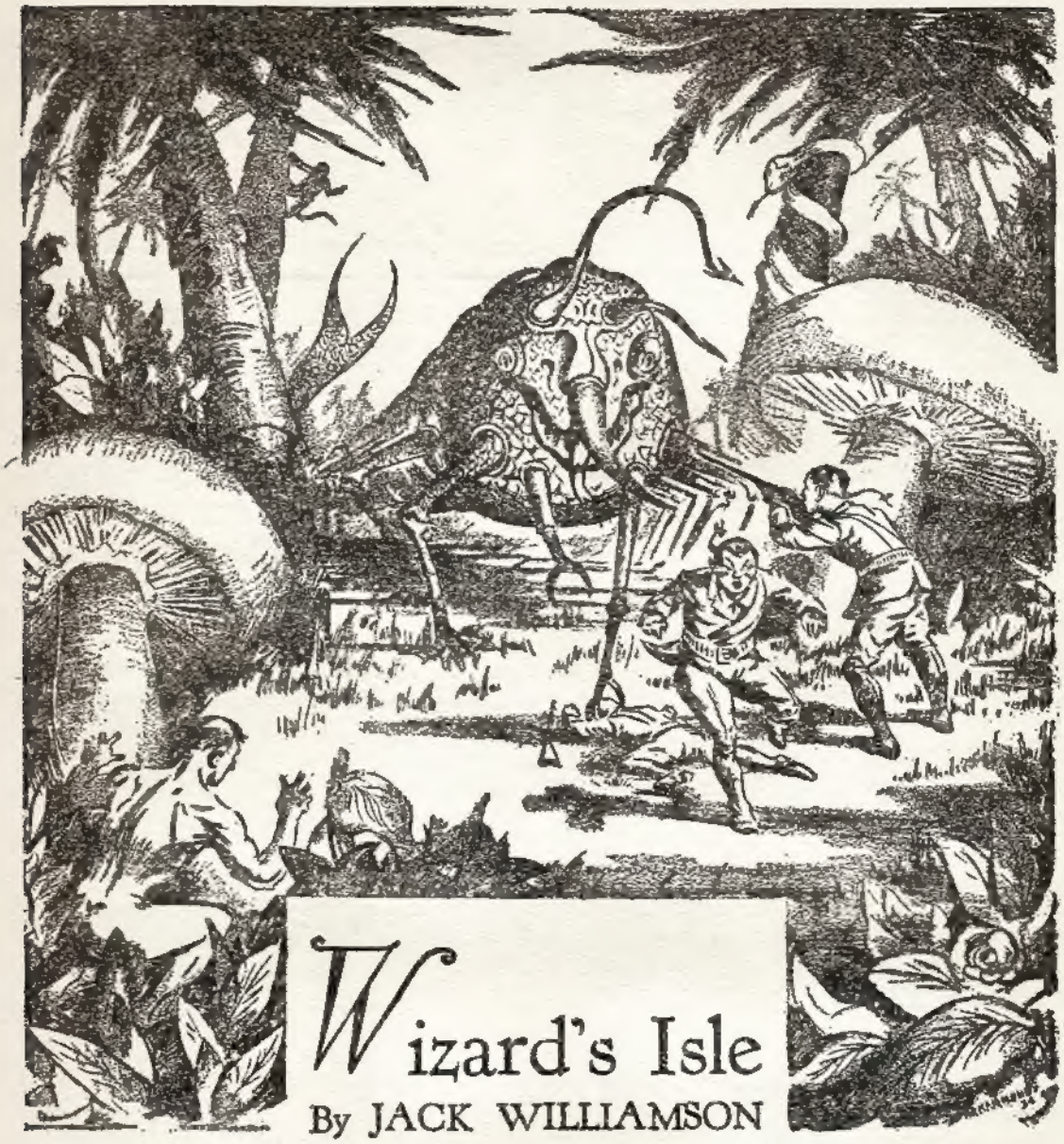
"Out of the dense, unearthly jungle it came, a monster of madness and terror."



Wizard's Isle

By JACK WILLIAMSON

A swift-moving, vivid tale of a dreadful menace to the world—a weird-scientific story about an uncanny Oriental genius who sought to chain the world to his power

1. The Wizard of Life

"YOU'D be a fool to try it, Mr. Wade," protested the heavy man behind the black-topped desk. He lit a long dark cigar, without offering one to Jason Wade, and blew heavy smoke through thick lips. "Give it up," he advised. "Forget about the girl—it's too late now to help her, anyway. Go back to China."

"I may be a fool," Jason Wade rapped at him grimly, striding toward the desk, "but I'm going to keep on until I find Tonia Hope—or find what happened to her!"

And a dangerous sudden blue flickered in his eyes.

"Engaged to her, eh?" said the detective; and he made sympathetic clucking noises.

Jason Wade bent over the desk. Lean, not tall, he was hard and muscular. His short hair was sandy, colorless; his eyes were gray, usually mild enough. His skin was still dark from the sun of China. Used to smiling, his wide mouth now was a thin line, tensely grim.

"I am," he said, flatly. "She was waiting for me. Two years, I've been working a tin concession in Yunnan, China. This winter, I was coming home——"

He broke off, savagely grinding a hard fist into the palm of his left hand.

"Anyhow," he told the detective, "I was in Yunnan when she—vanished. I had a telegram from her aunt, Mrs. Todd, with whom she lived. I wired you, the next day, to take the case. That's been nearly two months ago.

"Two months!" he rapped. "And not a thing has been done to help her! I came as soon as I could—I had to sell out the concession, to raise a few thousand. But if you think I'm going to quit, now, without any effort to find her——"

"It's your funeral, not mine, Mr. Wade," sighed the big man. He shook his heavy, blue-jowled head. "Me, I'm washing my hands of the whole mess—and damned glad to get out with a whole skin. I wouldn't go on—not for twenty grand! There are some cases, Mr. Wade, that just ain't healthy."

"I'm going," Jason promised him, with quiet finality, "to find Tonia. If you're going to quit, I want to know what you've already found out."

The detective's heavy arm made a slow gesture of protest.

"I'll tell you, Mr. Wade. It ain't much, I've found. But it is enough so I know it's worth any man's life to pry any deeper. You'll think better of your rash idea, Mr. Wade, when you hear. It ain't no common case!"

"Go ahead," said Jason. "Have you located any suspect?"

"Well——" drawled the detective, and hesitated. "There's a man in the case. A tall, dark party. It was hard to get a line on him, but it seems he's some kind of Oriental, and very wealthy. He gave the name of Alexander."

"Alexander!" echoed Jason. "Give me all you know about him."

His mind flashed back to his call, that morning, on Tonia's aunt. A faded, elderly lady, Mrs. Justina Todd lived in a faded, ancient brownstone house. Dabbing at the blue, faded eyes behind spectacles, the old lady had told under a mysterious "Mr. Alexander".

Jack Williamson, author of "Wizard's Isle", is a young writer. Less than two years ago he was a student in the University of New Mexico. But his rare talent and logical mind, combined with an inexhaustible imagination, have already made him one of the Titans of fantastic fiction. First introduced to the readers of WEIRD TALES a year and a half ago with his startling story of strange thought-magic, "The Wand of Doom," he has been a frequent contributor to its pages since then. Those of you who remember his fascinating novel, "Golden Blood," will need no urging to read Jack's story in this issue. But those of you who have not yet read any stories by this young genius have a rare treat in store in the colorful tale presented herewith.

met Tonia, somewhere, and called on her, twice.

"She — *liked* him?" Jason had demanded, unable to keep a little catch of anxiety and pain from his voice. He was bitterly regretful that he had left Tonia for so long, though the girl had been eager for him to seize the opportunity in China.

"No, Jason," said the old lady, and her pale eyes warmed a little. "The poor dear never had a thought for anybody but you. Why, she'd been planning, for months, to send you a birthday gift. She had already bought it, before. . . ."

It was a fine wrist-watch. Jason touched the thin white case, when the old lady displayed it, with throbbing emotion. Tonia was still the same generous girl; the watch had been very expensive for her to give. And she hadn't forgotten! New resolution burned in him. He *must* find her!

"About this Mr. Alexander——" he prompted.

"I know he had a hand in it," the old lady told him. "Tonia asked him not to come again. She was afraid of him; I know that. And now he's gone, too. The police can't find him."

And that was all Mrs. Todd had been able to tell Jason. He waited, bent anxiously over the desk, for the detective to speak.

"WELL," the broad-featured man rumbled on, "I got a line on the bird, like I tell you. I've identified him with a certain mysterious party who buys scientific supplies. For ten years he has been buying electrical machinery and biological laboratory supplies — literally millions of dollars' worth, Mr. Wade! He deals with different companies, and with different names — none of them knowing his right one.

"Most of his business, lately," added the detective, "has been done through a Yankee named Jabez Head. Head's a good guy to look for, Mr. Wade, if you want to get bumped off!"

"You think," demanded Jason, "it was this—'Mr. Alexander'?"

"He saw the girl," said the big man, heavily succinct. "She was beautiful. He's got a reputation of taking what he wants. He's a man you had better lay off, Mr. Wade."

"Where could I find him?" questioned Jason, grimly.

"I don't know," said the detective. "Don't want to. He ain't in America. But I've picked up a hint, Mr. Wade, from men in the shipping business."

"What's that?"

"Several years ago, Mr. Wade, something was built on the desert coast of the Arabian Sea. Something big. It took thousands of tons of glass and steel—ships landed it there. Coolies did the work—and disappeared afterward, with the thing they built."

"But what was it?"

"Just what the thing was, Mr. Wade, or exactly where it was built, or what became of it, or who paid for it, are things that nobody will tell you. But I got a hunch that this bird Alexander built the thing, and that he's in it, now. Probably he's got the girl there."

"Then," declared Jason, quietly, "I'm going to find it."

"I wouldn't," said the detective. He was suddenly displaying a curious reticence, almost a fear. He cleared his throat behind a fat hand, finally spoke in a hoarse whisper: "Did you ever hear of a man called the Wizard of Life?"

"Yes," Jason told him. "There was talk, in China. Vague whispers, some of them rather terrible, about a mysterious figure called Iskandar the Wizard. He's

said to have an uncanny power over living things. He's a descendant of Alexander, according to the tales—or claims to be. They call him by the Persian form of the name, Iskandar. But there are so many weird legends whispered through the East——"

"The Wizard of Life ain't no legend, Mr. Wade," declared the detective, heavily. "I've had a warning. That's why I'm withdrawing from the case."

"A warning?" queried Jason, swiftly. "What was it?"

The big man hesitated, apprehension on his broad face.

"Well," he said at last, "a man phoned me. He said he was Jabez Head. He asked me if I ever heard of the Wizard of Life. He told me to lay off."

"That was all?" snapped Jason.

"It was. And it was enough! If you can see what's good for you, Mr. Wade——"

"Is there anything else you've found out?" Jason cut in, impatiently.

"That's all. We'll get you out a regular report. Oh, Mr. Wade, there was another case that might have some connection. It was very similar. The snatchers worked the same way, and there was no demand for ransom."

"Let's hear about it," Jason prompted.

"A Mr. Gerald Travers, and his wife——"

"Jerry Travers!" cried Jason. "Why, I knew Jerry at Yale. A big, jolly, red-headed chap. He majored in biology. You mean to say Jerry's been kidnapped?"

"Sounds like the same party," said the detective. "Travers was a biologist. He was employed by a drug manufacturer in Ohio. He and his wife disappeared while on a trip to New York, a year ago —without a trace!"

JASON paid, without protest, the fee the detective demanded, and walked out of the office, pondering what he had learned. An amazing pattern it was—the unknown, fabulously wealthy "Mr. Alexander"—the mysterious purchases of scientific equipment—the rumored secret construction—the enigmatic whisperings of Iskandar the Wizard—the unaccountable vanishings of Jerry Travers and Tonia Hope. The import of it all was incredible, and darkly sinister.

He could not blame the detective for his haste to abandon the case; the threat of insidious peril was too unmistakable. But Jason himself did not think of giving it up. He spent the rest of the day trying to locate Jabez Head.

He failed to find Head. He returned to his apartment at eleven o'clock that night. Two men, waiting in the entry, slapped a sheet of adhesive plaster over his face. They dragged him into the street, vacant at that hour, and bundled him into a closed automobile.

After two hours, perhaps, of rapid driving, the vehicle stopped on some quiet beach—all the roar of New York was gone; he could hear restless, surging water, the barking of a far-off dog, the distance-softened bellow of a locomotive whistle.

There the two men flung him into a small boat, face down in an inch of foul water. They pushed off, started a popping outboard motor, and cut away from the shore — they must be, Jason knew, upon Long Island Sound.

He made, then, his one fierce attempt at escape. Rugged from life in the open, he was strong and quick enough, though not a large man. He struck out suddenly, bowled one man over a thwart, and tried to slip over the side — he planned to tear off his blindfold under

water, and swim away from the guns of his captors in the darkness.

But the other man struck him savagely on the temple with the flat side of an automatic. When he recovered consciousness, with head splitting, tight-drawn cords were cutting painfully into his wrists and ankles, and he was being hauled into the cabin of a seaplane.

Now, Jason guessed, from his weariness and bitter thirst, the seaplane had been aloft for twenty hours. That meant that he might be anywhere within a radius of possibly three thousand miles of New York.

Listening, he had studied his two captors. One, who had manhandled him with the brute strength of an ape, whose heavy body smelled unwashed, who spoke with the snarl of the underworld, appeared to be called Hap Nino. The other, who had given the orders, with a clipped, metallic voice that had a Yankee twang, was addressed as Jabe. He, Jason became certain, was Jabez Head himself, the evasive agent for whom he had been searching.

Yes, he had found Jabez Head, he was thinking; and the drawn face beneath his blindfold smiled bitterly at the irony of his success.

Then he was startled out of the sick insensibility of despair by the hard voice of the man, ringing above the endless drone of the motor:

"Hold still, brother, if ye want yer blinkers off."

He felt rough hands about his head, braced himself. The adhesive plaster came away, jerked so savagely that he felt a good deal of skin must have gone with it. He blinked his eyes against the gray light in the little cabin.

Before he could see, he heard the other man snarl protestingly.

"Don't matter if he gets an eyeful," snapped Jabez Head, ominously. "*He* won't be blabbing about it."

Jason was sprawled on the rear seat, wrists and ankles bound, numb. Jabez Head, standing over him, proved to be a lean, sharp-featured man, with small eyes, close-set and greenish, restlessly watchful; he was ungainly in an oversize leather coat. Hap Nino was sitting on a forward seat; Jason saw the back of a short-clipped bullet head, a massive, long-armed body swelling a scarlet sweater. He glimpsed the pilot through the forward opening — yellow-skinned, perhaps Chinese.

"Where are you taking me?" Jason asked, voice husky in his dry throat.

"Reckon ye'll find out fer yerself, soon enough," the hard voice snapped back. Jabez Head chuckled, dryly, unpleasantly, and added, "Look fer yerself, brother, if ye like. Reckon ye won't be taking any tales back."

His greenish, narrow eyes jerked at the glassed windows.

JASON glanced out upon a gray, windy sky; he saw, far under them, a grim, leaden sea, glittering with innumerable vanishing flecks of spray. They must be, he supposed, somewhere over the Atlantic—and driving into a storm.

He moved his throbbing wrists, and leaned over to look downward through the glass, following the glance of the greenish eyes. A wild sea stretched, illimitable, under the lowering, gloomy sky; an endless sheet of tarnished lead, picked ominously with the dull flash of spray. Over it, far away, he saw a remarkable thing, a thing that amazed him—a gray, glistening dome, resting on the leaden sea. Enormous, he knew it must be; a full half-mile across, he estimated, and many hundred feet high. So huge it was, that the white fury of

the sea made only a thin gleaming line along one edge of it.

It was gray, like glass. Its flattened top bore tiny buildings. A triangle of smooth water lay to leeward of it, black, unscarred by the vanishing stabs of foam.

"Look yer fill," advised the hard voice of Jabez Head, maliciously. "Reckon it's about the last thing ye'll see, brother."

Jason looked, and gave himself to mad conjecture. The thing was stupendous, incredible. It must have cost millions, many millions. It was the construction, he knew, that had been built on the Arabian coast; it was here that the secretly purchased equipment and supplies had been taken—and also, he guessed, Jerry Travers and Tonia Hope!

But what was it? What strange purpose lay behind it? Could it be the secret rendezvous of the fabulous Oriental called Iskandar, Wizard of Life? If so, of what sinister plan was it part? And —a more personal concern—why might Tonia have been brought here, and what had been her fate?

The throbbing of numb limbs, the discomfort of his dry throat, the pulsation of the blood-caked bruise on his temple, brought him from fruitless speculation back to more immediate concerns. He lifted his swollen wrists, restlessly. His body shrieked for relief; yet it would gain him nothing, he knew, to demand it. He asked another question:

"What do you want with me?"

He thought he knew; he thought it was because the unknown power against him wanted to stop his investigation, his search for Tonia Hope. But he wanted to hear the answer.

"Reckon ye'll find that out soon enough," Jabez Head chuckled evilly. "We're bringing ye to call on Mr. Iskandar. The Wizard of Life, he likes to be called. Reckon he'll tell ye what he wants."

That fitted in, definitely; another astounding piece of the puzzle. And it was becoming a dreadful and sinister picture. Jason shuddered, contemplating it. A strange Oriental, calling himself the new Alexander, collecting about him the power of modern science, lifting the head of unthinkable menace to the safety of the world.

But yet the puzzle was not complete. What weird power could lie beyond those fantastic tales that had earned the man the title, Wizard of Life? Why had Jerry Travers, the brilliant young biologist, been abducted? What insidious design might have been laid against lovely, innocent Tonia Hope? What unaccountable purpose lay beyond the whole astounding project?

Those riddles were swept from Jason's mind, as the roar of the motor died, as the seaplane sloped down, over the black triangle of smooth water, toward the colossal dome of the floating island.

2. *The Thing that Welt*

A LONG, unbroken deck rushed up to meet them, gray, glistening. Jason felt the shock as the landing-gear touched —the plane, he realized, was amphibian. The motor idled, and stopped. He could hear the scream of the wind, the thunder of seas that smashed to white foam on the walls of this astounding, man-made isle. There was no rolling, no vibration. Even in the storm, the floating structure was steady as a rock.

Jabez Head stirred himself. Hap Nino, the gorilla, rose, yawned, stretched his long-armed body; he patted an ominous bulge at his breast. Forward, the Oriental pilot was silently busy with his instruments.

"Well, mugs, we're here," snapped

Jabez Head's hard voice. "Everybody out!" He turned to Jason. "Hold still, brother, if ye like yer health. And obey orders!"

He loosened the cords to let Jason rub his numbed wrists; he sloshed water from a canteen into his face, and let him hold it to gulp a few swallows.

Hap Nino was opening the cabin door. They dragged Jason out, into the bitter, ice-laden wind that lashed across the open gray platform. He stumbled on numb feet and fell to hands and knees —the deck was glass, he found, dimly transparent; he could see through it into vague, gloomy spaces.

"Keep on yer pegs, brother," Jabez Head advised him, grimly.

Hap Nino jerked him roughly back to his feet. He managed to stand; reeling, he peered about him. The flattened top of the immense glass dome was five hundred yards across. Nearly half of it had been left clear for the landing-deck.

The rest was railed, scattered with low white buildings—a line of hangars, by the open deck; a radio station, with steel masts; long buildings that must have been barracks; a huge, low structure in the center, with a many-windowed turret. And there were three low spires or towers that bore huge globes, shining, silvery.

Men in white coveralls came out of the hangar to take charge of the plane. They were Chinese, squat, expressionless, impassive. Jason felt something sinister in their silence, in their swift, mechanical efficiency. They reflected an organization, an unseen power, a pitiless purpose, that bent men ruthlessly to its ends.

Jabez Head snapped, "Come on, brother."

He seized Jason's arm and hurried him away. A few times he tripped, on numb, lifeless feet. The gaunt man jerked him roughly up. Hap, the gorilla, kept ominously behind.

"Stand up, brother," cracked Jabez Head, "if ye prize yer skin."

Beyond the hangars, they entered a broad way paved with heavy gray glass. They approached the huge low building, of gray-painted metal, that stood in the center of the dome's flat crown. A door opened for them, silently; they walked into a gloomy hall.

The man by the door, Jason noted, was Chinese. His tawny face was a grim mask, inscrutable, lifeless. Ominous it was, with the shadow of some insidious, implacable power that molded men like clay.

From the gloomy hall, they climbed a short flight of steps, into a remarkable room. It was, Jason knew, the interior of the turret he had seen from below. Through great windows the flattened top of the glass dome was visible, and the gray buildings upon it, and the angry sea beyond, glinting with spray, reaching off to horizons of gloomy cloud.

Mechanisms glistened along the walls, a few of them familiar — barometers, radio compass, a powerful telescope — but most of them unfamiliar either in nature or application. This was, Jason understood, the bridge of the colossal ship, the nerve-center of the vast and complex machinery that must exist to control it and protect it and make it habitable.

The modern effect of the gleaming brass and nickel-instruments was offset bizarrely by elements of Oriental atmosphere. The deep-piled, darkly rich rugs had come from Isfahan; the silken tapestries, between the windows, were woven with scarlet dragons. A massive jade Buddha squatted in a niche; elaborately delicate silver lamps hung from

the green vault of the ceiling; fragrance of incense haunted the room.

The man there was as Oriental as the room; yet there was about him nothing voluptuous, no hint of Eastern languor. He had an air of ruthless aggression, of resistless, dynamic power, that seemed Occidental.

Attired in a long robe of richly brocaded purple silk, trimmed with white fur, the man in the room was an impressive figure. His face was massive, ivory-hued, with lips startlingly, almost femininely red and full. Intense, piercing, magnetic, his long eyes were slightly oblique. His hair was black, his nose prominent, his ivory forehead high and bulging. His face was coldly and completely impassive, yet somehow indefinably sinister.

"Here's yer man, Mr. Iskandar," briefly reported Jabez Head.

THE man rose slowly from the heavy teak desk, where he had been thumbing papers, and came deliberately toward them. He was very tall, almost statuesque in the purple robe. Jason watched him, with a little catch in his breathing.

Iskandar! This was the new Alexander, whispered of through restless Asia. Iskandar, Wizard of Life, who could reputedly mold living things into any shape he fancied — the tales that Jason had heard were fantastic, dreadful. And he must be also the mysterious Mr. Alexander, whom Justina Todd blamed for the disappearance of Tonia Hope.

"How do you do?" he greeted Jason, his voice deeply musical, equally devoid of accent or expression. "Your name is Jason Wade?"

"It is," affirmed Jason, promptly, glad of a chance at least to speak for himself. "And I don't mind saying," he added, "that I've been outrageously treated!"

Slanted, enigmatic eyes stared back at him, unreadable — but, whatever they were, certainly not genial or friendly.

"You were brought here, Jason Wade," the richly musical tones rang back, "because I wish to ask you a question."

"Very well," said Jason, still unabashed. "And I want to ask you one!"

"Why, since you returned from the Orient," resumed Iskandar, "have you been so diligently seeking information along—certain lines?"

"Because," Jason grimly replied, "I want to know what has become of a certain young woman. And that brings us to my question: where is Tonia Hope?"

The oblique eyes stared at him, dark, magnetic, veiled.

"Jason Wade," asked the richly musical voice, suavely ignoring his question, "you are not connected in any way with the military forces of your Government?"

"Why, no——"

The long, coal-black eyes stabbed into his frank gray ones.

"Or of any country?"

"No."

"You were merely searching for the girl, on your own initiative?"

"That's right," agreed Jason, grimly. "And I've reason to suspect that you know what happened to her!"

"Yes, Mr. Wade," Iskandar said deliberately, "I do. I tell you out of gratitude." The musical tones were faintly mocking. "You have relieved me of an apprehension. I had feared that you were a spy of some Government. And I am not yet ready to have an official interest taken in my activities."

Jason realized, then, that he had made a mistake in admitting that he played a lone hand. But it was too late to correct it.

"She's here?" he asked, tight-lipped.

"She is. Would you care to see her?"

The black, almond-shaped eyes were still upon him, with that intent, impersonal, unreadable stare.

Hope had come to him, sudden, throbbing, painful, with Iskandar's question. And red anger followed it; he knew that it was asked in mockery. But he tried to conceal his anger, and replied in a quiet, even tone:

"Yes, I'd be glad to see her."

"Follow me," said Iskandar; and, to Jabez, "Bring him."

And Jason, still conducted by Jabez Head and Hap Nino, followed him out of the amazing tower room, and down a gloomy hall. From the hall, they came into a small, curious room, whose floor was glass.

"There is the young woman," said Iskandar, and pointed down through the glass.

Jason looked into a metal-walled space beneath, into a square tank, windowless, with a locked metal door. It was simply furnished, like a room, with a narrow bed and a table and a chair. A few ragged, worn magazines lay on the table. One the bed, in a long white garment, was a woman, sleeping. . . .

His heart leapt. It *was* Tonia Hope! With misty eyes he recognized the thick golden hair, the very fair skin, the smooth, familiar curve of the brow, the impudent little tilt of the chin. His heart ached with gladness. It was Tonia, unharmed, sleeping peacefully.

Abruptly, then, his gladness gave way to gnawing dread. Why was she locked up, alone, in that odd little tank? Why was she imprisoned under glass, like—well, like a bug under a microscope? Why, anyhow, had she been brought here?

He was wheeling on Iskandar with his questions, when she woke, as if she had sensed their presence. Her wide blue eyes stared up through the glass at purple-robed Iskandar, shadowed with infinite weariness and with hopeless despair and with—terror!

Jason, then, made a little angry movement toward the tall, ivory-skinned Oriental, and the terrified eyes found him. Instantly they changed. Gladness came into them. Ineffable joy. Throbbing hope. And pleading. . . .

She sprang up, and reached out her arms toward him. Her lips moved, but no sound came through the glass.

Jason was blind and giddy, and confused with a whirl of thoughts. Tonia was a prisoner here! She still loved him! There had been no mistaking the joy in her tortured eyes. And she was in awful terror of Iskandar!

He tried to shout something to her, through the glass floor.

"Come," said Iskandar. "You have seen her."

JABEZ HEAD and Hap Nino dragged Jason out of the little room. He was choking with anger, sick with cold fear. He had no idea why Tonia was shut up in the strange little cell under the glass, but it was obvious that she lived in devouring terror.

"What have you done to her?" he demanded of Iskandar, as the tall Oriental strode ahead of him. "Why did you bring her here? And what is she doing in that—pit?"

The man stopped, looked back at him with stabbing almond eyes. Again Jason felt that he was merely the subject of a casual experiment. He felt that the Wizard was playing with him, applying one stimulus or another, simply for the satisfaction of watching him respond. Rage boiled in him at the man's impersonal, pitiless cruelty.

"You wish to know my purpose with the young woman?"

"I do."

The full lips, red, strikingly feminine against the ivory mask, tightened to a crueler curve.

"I shall tell you, to reward you for your assurance that you represent no official power." There was a sinister mockery in the musical tone. "First, you must know that I am called Iskandar, Wizard of Life."

"I knew that."

"For many years," went on Iskandar, "I have carried on research into the secrets of life. I have fathomed the nature of the protoplasmic cell, which is the basis of all life. I have mastered its control and manipulation by radiations, by chemical means, by feeding.

"Perhaps you are familiar, Mr. Wade, with some of the surprizing results that have been attained along this line, by the use of radium, X-ray, endocrine extracts, and so on?"

"Yes," whispered Jason, thinking of articles he had read, about monstrosities of life that science had created. Dwarfed and gigantic and monstrous things science had grown, he knew, by manipulation of the ductless glands. Fantastic freaks had been created by a force of evolution accelerated a hundred times by mutations caused with the X-ray.

He shuddered a little, in spite of himself. A faint amusement flickered in the dark, tilted eyes of Iskandar.

"I have gone far beyond other investigators along that line," the oddly reverberant, musical voice rolled on. "And I have achieved results that, I believe, you will find surprizing. I feel that I am justly entitled to be known as the Wizard of Life."

"Yes?" said Jason.

He waited, cautious, on his guard against some shock of horror. He had the uncomfortable feeling that he was a fly on a dissecting-needle, being dismembered for the satisfaction of this pitiless Oriental.

"I shall show you one of my creations," said the golden voice, softly rich, coldly free of expression. "Sight of it, I'm sure, will give you a more comprehensive idea of the nature of my work. And it will help you to understand my purpose with the young woman in whom you appear to be so interested.

"Come," he said, nodding to Jabez Head and the apish Hap Nino.

Jason, warned by a hint of the sinister in Iskandar's manner, was prepared for a shock. Yet the horror of the thing he saw dazed him, rocked his very sanity.

"Come," repeated the tall, rich-robed Oriental, and led him deliberately into another small room, also with a floor of glass.

"There," throbbed the musical voice, "is the creation of my science that I wish you to see. Does it not give me a fair right to be called the Wizard of Life?"

He pointed down through the crystal floor. Jason gazed after his long-nailed ivory finger, voiceless with horror, shuddering.

Beneath the glass was a square pit or tank, like that in which he had seen Tonia Hope. It was flooded with intense light, of a blue-green, uncanny hue, that came from great, strangely twisted tubes fastened high at the ends of the tank.

On the filth that littered the floor, bathed in the terrible light, was a thing of pure, mind-cracking horror—a scorpion, Jason's dazed brain perceived, with the head of a man!

Sprawling on the foul floor, it was a huge thing, infinitely dreadful. Its body was larger than a man's, and was armored with red plates that gleamed strangely in

the fearful green light. Tapering, yards long, the slender tail was armed with a hideous sting. The great forelimbs bore enormous, fearful pincers.

And, though his whirling, horror-numbed mind revolted at acceptance of the fact, it had a man's head—a head unmistakably human, set above the dreadful forelimbs. It had thick red hair, shaggy, matted. The neck of it grew into that body of crimson-armored horror. It was alive, Jason saw incredulously . . . and weeping. . . .

The face looked up at them, through the floor of glass—a white, haggard face, drawn with the most terrible look of agony and despair that Jason had ever seen. The eyes were blue and dark and sunken, bright with tears. They were shadowed with grief and pain and hopeless hate—and with horror unutterable.

The thing was weeping.

And he knew the face! It was the face of Jerry Travers, the brilliant young biologist who had vanished unaccountably, with his bride, as Tonia Hope had vanished. It was the face of the big, jovial, red-headed Westerner, whom Jason had known at Yale. Jerry Travers! The keen-minded, good-humored young scientist, with his body grown into a monstrous scorpion! The thing was horrible beyond credence; yet Jason saw recognition of himself in those horror-filmed eyes—and a tragic appeal.

That face, Jason knew, would haunt him for ever. He covered his eyes, shrank back from it. Then quick pity followed his horror; pity—and red blazing anger at the tall, ironically suave Oriental beside him on the floor of glass. He swung upon Iskandar, spoke in a voice thick with emotion:

"You did that? To Jerry Travers! You did—*that?*"

ISKANDAR chuckled with a sinister mirth, and silently motioned to Jason's guards to lead him off the floor of glass. Deliberately his voice rolled out, musical and deep and colorless:

"Yes, Wade, that was one of my creations. Quite a feat, don't you admit, to cause the body cells of the human to degenerate to the arthropod level, without material change to the head? I warned you, I believe, that you might be surprized."

"You must kill it," whispered Jason, faintly. "It's dreadful that a man should live on in such agony—or a man's brain."

"It doesn't want to die," responded Iskandar, suavely, musically. "It wants to live—to kill me! That is why I let it continue to exist. I derive an esthetic satisfaction from its hate."

They had come out into the hall, Jason reeling, half carried by Jabez Head. His soul was sick with horror.

"How can you bear," his dry voice whispered, "to see the suffering in its eyes?"

"There is an esthetic pleasure," observed the tall Oriental, calmly, "to be had from the contemplation of emotion. You, doubtless, enjoy witnessing a play, in which the characters are personifications of the various emotions, of love or hate or jealousy or fear. But your crude faculties, apparently, are satisfied by the mere shallow imitation of emotion. My own esthetic appreciations, Mr. Wade, are refined beyond yours. I have made life my play. I prefer genuine emotion in real human beings, to the synthetic imitation upon the stage. And the most intense, therefore the most pleasurable, emotions are hate and horror and terror."

"I believe it," Jason shot at him, angrily. "But why did you do that to Jerry? What excuse——"

"It was partly," Iskandar replied suave-

ly, "as a test of my mastery over the processes of life, and partly as an example to others who might think of disobeying me; but largely because I derived an esthetic satisfaction from so punishing an insolent young man who thought to defeat my purposes."

"That was," Jason gasped, "—a *punishment?*"

"Precisely," responded the deep, emotionlessly musical voice. "I brought the man here to assist with my laboratory work. He was quite a competent technician. . . . But he refused to assist with my undertaking. He had the temerity, even, to make a fantastic, futile attempt to upset my plans for the future of the human race."

The tall, purple-robed Wizard chuckled with golden mirth.

"After his insolent refusal to assist with one experiment, I made him the subject of another. I placed him in the ray chamber, exposed to the radiations of the green tubes you saw. The green rays, together with certain chemicals in the air he breathed, with additions to his food, and certain injections into his blood, effected the change in his body cells that you observed. That was nearly a year ago."

"His wife?" breathed Jason, remembering. "What became of her?"

"It was she," said Iskandar, "who gave the final esthetic touch. He loved her, you see. . . . She was a witness to the experiment. She was confined in the room we just entered, above the glass floor. She watched the change. She died, some weeks ago . . . laughing! She had been, for some months, insane."

Jason bit his lip. The nails of his tight hands cut into his palms.

"You," he breathed, dazed with horror, "you did—that?"

"Certainly," agreed the Oriental, smoothly. "And if you care to see further examples of the possibilities of cell-manipulation——"

Abruptly, Jason was shaken by another chill of horror. A thought had come to him that was dreadful, unthinkable.

"Tonia?" he whispered. His voice was a hoarse, dry rasp. "You aren't going to—to—*change* her?"

"On the other hand," said Iskandar, "I am."

Jason grasped at Jabez Head's hard arm. They were back in the amazing tower room. And it seemed to spin around him. The gray deck of glass and the flat gray sea beyond its huge windows tilted and whirled. His voice was choked and hoarse with horror.

"You—*are?*"

"I surely am, Mr. Wade. I am developing a new race, to replace the ugly, inefficient beasts that now call themselves men."

A STRANGE fanaticism had crept into the throbbing musical voice; it blazed in the compelling, slanted black eyes.

"I am truly the Wizard of Life. I am creating a new human race. It will go forth from this island to conquer the world. The things you know as men will be their chattels and slaves. I, Iskandar the Wizard, will make over the world, as the great Macedonian, my ancestor, made it over before me."

Jason shrank from the man. He was terrible. In his reverberant voice, in his blazing, night-black eyes, was a power, a mad inspiration.

"And the girl, Tonia Hope," the fascinating voice throbbed on, "is chosen to a duty of rare honor."

Jason rasped, with a desperate effort, "What's that?"

"She is chosen to be the mother of the

new race. Very soon, when a little more preliminary work is completed, I shall make the injections into her blood, and mix the vapors in the air that circulates about her, and flood her cell with the radiations. And she will be changed into the first of the new race. She will be the mother of the conquerors!"

Jason reeled, sick with nightmare horror. The dragon hangings and the great silver lamps and the jade Buddha wove fantastic patterns across his spinning world. It was incredible, insane. Yet this amazing, diabolical genius had showed him enough so that Jason knew he had power to do the thing.

"And now," asked Iskandar, his musical tones lower, again faintly mocking, "is your curiosity satisfied, Mr. Wade?"

Jason tried to speak, but he was faint with horror. A dry, whispering gasp was all that came. But for the arm of Jabez Head, he might have fallen.

"I must thank you, Mr. Wade," throbbed the mocking voice, "for allaying my apprehensions of official investigation. However," it added, "don't think me defenseless. I prefer that my enterprise should yet remain unknown. But, if it should become necessary, the three silver spheres you see upon the pylons outside project an energy capable of destroying any navy on earth, in half an hour."

Jason fought to recover his faculties, tried to find voice for some protest against the unthinkable atrocity designed upon Tonia Hope. Still horror would not let him speak.

"Captain Head," Iskandar addressed the gaunt man supporting him, "Mr. Wade appears faint. Take him for a walk, if you please, in the fresh air outside. It may revive him."

"Yes, sir," snapped the hard voice of Jabez Head.

"And be careful, Captain," the deep voice added, with expressionless significance, "that Mr. Wade does not slip and fall into the sea. With the ice upon it, the deck is very slick."

"Yes, Mr. Iskandar," cracked Jabez Head. And he added, unnecessarily, "I understand, Mr. Iskandar."

The thin New Englander and ape-like Hap Nino led Jason out of the strange vast tower room, dazed with realization that the Wizard's last words had been a sentence of death.

3. The Crucible of Hell

THE ice-laden wind lashed them, as they came outside and upon the gray, slippery pave of glass. With Jabez Head at one arm, Hap Nino at the other, Jason was dragged unresistingly down the broad, ice-armored way, past the squat radio station, past one of the pylons that bore an enigmatic argent sphere, to the low metal rail at the edge of the flattened top of the dome.

He made a vain struggle, as they came near the railing, and slipped to his knees on the ice-coated glass. The men dragged him back to his feet.

"Don't fuss so, brother," the hard Yankee voice of Jabez Head advised him, ironically. "Ye might slip, on this ice, and fall off in the sea. Mr. Iskandar would be sorry about that."

He chuckled, as they dragged Jason to the railing.

Beyond, the gray glass sloped down, glistening with ice. A gentle slope at first, it became swiftly steeper. He could see the slate-gray, raging sea beyond, flinging up wild white arms of spume. Above the howl of the bitter wind, he could hear the thunder of mad water against the edge of the dome.

"You're white men," Jason appealed desperately. "How can you be servants of

that monster? How can you stand to see him do such — such hellish things? You've seen Jerry Travers—or the thing that was Jerry. You've seen Tonia Hope, the girl he's going to twist into some hideous form with his infernal science. You've seen her, so young and so lovely! And we could stop him! Just the three of us. Stop him, before it's too late. We must! No matter what happens to us afterward!"

"Can the gab, bo," snarled Hap Nino.

"You saw that—that *thing!* With the man's head. Jerry Travers was my friend——"

"Ye're crazy as a bedbug, brother," the hard voice of Jabez Head cut him off. "We know which side our bread is buttered on. We're the only whites here. The rest is damn' Chinks. We're agents for Mr. Iskandar, ashore. We haul down a grand a week. Hell, brother, we couldn't cross him if we wanted to! He's got his damn' yeller soldiers scattered all over the place. And them white balls on the towers could wipe out the whole damn' navy! . . . Why don't ye be careful, brother? Ye'll fall!"

Hap Nino had pushed him, while Jabez spoke. He toppled over the low rail. Grinning unpleasantly, the gaunt man made a pretense of grasping for him, knocked his hand loose from the rail with a malicious blow.

"Careful, brother," Jabez Head called mockingly after him, "or ye'll fall in the sea!"

Sprawling on the slippery, ice-filmed glass, Jason clutched at it vainly with his fingers. He slid down the slope of the enormous dome, at first rather slowly. Gaunt, green-eyed man and bulky, gorilla-like man, above him, stood by the rail and chuckled at his futile struggles.

He slid faster; the roar of the mad, ice-cold sea below came swiftly nearer. No stopping, now! He was plunging into the storm-lashed ocean.

He made no more effort to check his fall. Instead, he tore off his coat, and struggled into a position on his face, head foremost, ready for the dive.

Though a strong swimmer, Jason had no real hope of saving his life. No man, he knew, could survive more than a few minutes in the heaving, frigid water. The two would not have let him slide down alive if there had been any probability of escape.

But a burning determination had been born in Jason Wade to kill Iskandar. He *must,* for Tonia's sake. There was ground for no slightest hope that he could do the thing; yet purpose flamed strong in him, fed with memory of the sobbing horror, of Iskandar's pitiless cruelty, of Tonia's unthinkable danger.

He plunged down. Bitter air screamed about him. The racing glass was hot, stinging, beneath his body. Then he flew clear of it. A trough yawned for him, in green-gray, foaming water, another hundred feet below.

It struck him with savage, bruising force; he was swallowed in dark, crushing, icy depths. His clothing dragged him back, as he struggled for the surface. He tore himself free of it. His head broke through into smothering spray.

Already numbed, chilled, he strangled in salty foam. A mountainous wave drove him at the vertical wall of the floating island — it was steel, beneath the glass, to a height of forty feet, painted gray. Fiercely, vainly, he struggled back; he was flung against it, cruelly.

He was slightly to windward of the floating isle. He would try, he thought dimly, to swim toward the leeward side. He might live a few minutes longer there—a few more minutes, to wait for

the miracle which alone could give him the fighting chance he longed for.

Heaving, icy water flung him again at the steel wall; again he fought to save himself from being pulped against it. Then, as he fell back into the trough, numb, battered, strangling, he saw the grating.

It was the only break he had seen in the gray steel wall. A circular port, closed with a massive, rusty grille of iron, it was twenty feet above him, now. But the last sea had rushed over it; green water was still gushing back through the bars.

If he could reach it, somehow, and enter! It was a desperate chance, but his only one. He gasped for breath, tried to estimate the motion of the next wave, struggled desperately to get where the crest would fling him toward the grating.

A green, resistless flood boiled up under him. Stinging spray, whipped freezing on the bitter wind, choked him, blinded him. He could do no more than fight to keep above the surface.

The steel wall crushed against him, with a cruel impact. He had failed to reach the grate. It was still several feet above him, and he would never have another chance; he would be carried far past before the next wave came.

He clawed vainly at the cold metal with his fingers. A last ironic fillip of the sea flung him up. His torn fingers closed on the rusty bars. The ocean went down, and left him there, a numb limp bundle, clinging in the freezing wind.

He got his breath, and rested, until the mad sea smashed at him again. White water stung him, smothered him, hammered him against the grate, tore at him with resistless power.

When it had gone down again, he found energy to shake the barrier. It was hinged on one side, fastened at the other, he perceived, with a rusty bolt. With foul water gushing out upon him, he reached through the bars, fumbled with the bolt.

It was stiff with rust. His numb, bleeding fingers could not move it. Another sea hammered him; it left him clinging to the grille, shivering, exhausted, battered. He dragged himself up, and tried again.

The bolt loosened. The grille creaked outward. He swung his trembling body under it, climbed into a reeking dark passage. A terrific, driving wave slammed the grate behind him, and buried him a last time with icy water.

Weakly, on hands and knees, he climbed up a dark, sloping tube, against a foot-deep stream of foul water. A few dozen yards he advanced, and came into an open, stagnant ditch; at last he stood upright, naked, exhausted, half frozen, under the dome of glass.

Too nearly dead to have any interest in his surroundings, he crawled out of the stagnant ditch, and collapsed in something that was green and growing. His coma of exhaustion must have passed into a natural sleep which lasted several hours; for when he came abruptly to himself, he felt less fatigued and extremely hungry.

He opened his eyes and sat up—and only then received the impact of amazement and horror from his unprecedented surroundings.

The immense glass dome arched above him, braced with spidery ribs of steel. The circular floor beneath it was enormous—some three thousand feet across, he estimated. It was broken only by a huge cylindrical pier which rose in the center of it, giving support, hundreds of feet above, to the spreading web of steel.

Suspended from the gloomy confusion of girders were strange lamps—gigantic

globes beneath shimmering, huge reflectors — that bathed the floor under the dome with a green light, unearthly, terrible.

The green, fearful radiance lit a world of horror—a scrap of jungle, riotous with roaring, swarming life that had revolted hideously from every law of normal, healthy nature—with life in mad rebellion against order or sanity. It was the dread laboratory, Jason realized, trembling before the terror of it, of the inhuman scientific genius who called himself the Wizard of Life.

It was a colossal crucible of nightmare horror, in which evolution, in the strange rays of the eery green globes, under the faintly violet vapor that filled the dome, had followed insane, unthinkable paths!

The narrow strip of green moss along the edges of the drainage ditch seemed natural enough, except for an abnormal luxuriance. But all about him, buzzing, humming, thrusting up, fighting a mad battle for perverted existence, was living nightmare.

A little away from the ditch, on either side, rose eldritch, unearthly jungle.

Mushrooms — amazing fungi, sickly, livid white, splotched with purple— towered thirty feet high. Avid maggots fed upon them, hideous, scarlet, the size of a man's body. Above their rotting masses hung enormous flies, from whose iridescent wings throbbed a deep and menacing roar.

Violet vines choked the fungoid forest; they covered colossal mushrooms with mountains of broad, shining leaves, and entwined them with huge, twisted lianas. They opened enormous bell-shaped blooms, that smelled powerfully and sickeningly sweet.

The violet leaves stirred with unseen life. Many things rustled and crawled and flew, in this crucible of hell—insane, unthinkable things from which Jason's mind recoiled in overburdening horror.

At first Jason had been savagely elated to find himself alive, and upon the floating island; but elation swiftly died, before realization of the terrific obstacles yet ahead. He was unarmed, amid the perils of this unthinkable jungle. Iskandar was still secure, among his Oriental soldiers and his unknown weapons.

Elation died, but purpose kept alive. As long as he breathed, Jason knew, he would fight to avenge Jerry Travers and to save Tonia Hope from a fate that was unnamable.

He stumbled up the ditch, toward the great central pier, seeking some way of escape from this pit of struggling horror. He beat a huge, droning fly from above his head, and fled precipitately from something scarlet and unthinkably hideous that reared itself from the violet vines as he passed, beside a white-and-purple mushroom.

And he came, presently, across strangely luxuriant green moss, to the round metal tube. A hundred feet thick, it plunged straight up to the spidery confusion of supporting girders above the sinister globes of green. It should, he reasoned, contain a stair or elevator. He tramped around it, and came indeed upon a door—but it was locked, and made of heavy steel that his best efforts could make no impression upon.

He was still beside it, when he heard a key in the lock. Hastily he retreated, and flung himself down behind a mass of lush violet vines, to watch. Three men left the door, to advance cautiously into the weird jungle.

One was very tall; the others appeared almost squat beside him. They all wore high boots and white laboratory jackets. Each of them carried a powerful rifle, each wore a revolver at his hip. Their

eyes roved the unearthly vegetation, questingly, as if they had come to hunt.

The tall man, Jason recognized, with a leap of his heart, was Iskandar!

The Oriental genius had descended into the eldritch hell of his laboratory, perhaps to investigate the results of some experiment.

The green men, alert, rifles ready, advanced cautiously into the jungle of horror, straight toward the mass of weird violet vines in which Jason lay concealed.

4. Hunters of Horror

UNDER the tangle of wide violet leaves, Jason lay on his face in sticky black muck. A forest of nightmare rose behind him: lush, bright mountains of violet vines; thick, snake-like lianas, rioting madly over incredibly colossal white-and-purple fungus. It hummed and crawled with the fearsome fruit of an evolution gone insane.

He shuddered, as horror soared over his head—a thing like a huge white vulture, with forehead and eyes and hair, above its black beak, that unmistakably had been human.

And he waited, breathless, tense, as the three armed men came cautiously near him, strange hunters stalking stranger game, beneath the terrible green radiance of the globes under the dome. Iskandar the Wizard, creator and master of this swarming hell of obscene perversion, strode ahead of his two squat Chinese guards.

Straight toward Jason they came, until he could see the massive, ivory-hued face of Iskandar, with its full red lips, womanish; until he looked, trembling, into the long, magnetic, jet-black eyes, aflame with strange power.

He tensed himself, ready to spring to his feet in another second. Even completely unarmed as he was, he would not wait, he resolved, to be shot down like a rabbit. Iskandar, he was certain, could not know he was here—there would be an instant of surprize. And in that instant he would spring, snatch at a gun. . . .

It was a desperate determination. The men were alert. They would surely fire before he could reach them. But, even so, he might live to snatch a gun, to kill Iskandar before he died, to save Tonia Hope from the unspeakable metamorphosis into some companion monstrosity to that soaring white vulture with the eyes and the skull of a man.

He caught his breath. They must see him soon. *Now!* . . .

His body had tightened for the leap. The three men were not twenty feet from him. But the slanted black eyes of Iskandar, roving the green-lit, nightmare vegetation, had seen something afar. His musical voice spoke a swift command to the others. They turned abruptly, moved away, guns ready. They were hunting, stalking some creature that Jason had not yet seen.

Jason let them get some distance from him, then followed, slipping through tangled, luxuriant violet vines that flamed with crimson blood; creeping among towering, white-and-purple mushrooms, upon whose rotten flesh avidly feasted gigantic scarlet maggots.

The Wizard was stalking game. Jason would, he decided, stalk the Wizard. If he could catch him a little apart from the others, slip up on him! . . . His frank nature rebelled at thought of striking silently from ambush, but it was the only way that gave him even the possibility of a chance to end the sinister projects of the mad Oriental.

He searched again for something that might serve as a weapon. But the stems of the violet vines were too lush and watery to be of any use; the stalks of the

mushrooms were soft and rotten. Finding nothing else, he scooped up full hands of the soft black muck. Perhaps he could fling that into a man's face, blind him until he could grapple with him.

He was thirty yards behind the three men, when they found the fearsome thing they had come to hunt. They still walked in a compact group, Iskandar ahead, all with rifles ready. Jason had been offered no opportunity to attack.

Scuttling out of the dense violet undergrowth of the unearthly jungle it came, a monster of madness and terror. The three men stood in front of it, blazing away with their rifles. The reports crashed and reverberated like thunder against the high dome.

A centipede, it was, increased to horrific, incredible dimensions by the uncanny science of the Wizard of Life—grown so terrible, Jason guessed, that it had now to be destroyed. Its red-black, segmented body, glistening strangely in the weird green light, was fully thirty feet long. Two vast poison fangs spread above its great hideous head like black horns. It came straight on, in the face of roaring rifles.

Jason's skin prickled; cold sweat came out upon his grimy body; he was trembling on the sheer brink of panic—but this, he realized, with a pause of his thudding heart, was the opportunity he had prayed for.

His chance! If he could interfere with the defense of the three men, let the hideous centipede reach them, it would do the task. There would be a certain justice in the destruction of the Wizard of Life by this nightmare creation of his own.

STRIVING to fling away his terror, Jason sprang to his feet and plunged toward the three men stolidly standing their ground before the black, many-limbed monstrosity scuttling at them from the other direction. A naked, haggard man, balls of black mud clutched in his hands, he leapt toward them, toward the centipede, yelling wildly.

Hideous death, he knew, would be the reward of success. He would die, with the others, at the fangs of the black horror; but it would be a willing death, if it saved Tonia Hope from the unutterable designs of Iskandar.

He was within ten yards of the three before they seemed aware of him. And the colossal centipede, a mind-breaking horror under the green, terrible rays that poured down from the dome, was not twice that far beyond.

One of the two shorter men, then, glanced back. His yellow, impassive face did not change at sight of Jason, but he whirled, leveling the smoking rifle in his hands.

Jason hurled his balls of black muck, twisted himself aside. The rifle thundered in his face; the bullet went screaming past his ear. His mud had gone true; it plastered the grim yellow visage. Jason leapt to grapple the man as he fired again, blindly.

The bullet went whining off toward the wall of the dome. As they came to grips, Jason saw that the scuttling eldritch monstrosity was upon the others. He saw the smaller man tossed, screaming hideously, upon a black, venomous horn, saw Iskandar calmly firing a last shot. Jason was conscious, even, of an ungrudging flash of admiration for the Oriental. Inhuman monster that he was, evil, pitilessly cruel, the man had unmistakable courage, to face so steadily that many-limbed horror.

Jason and his mud-spattered opponent went down together. Neither was a large man; both were quick and strong. The

Chinese had been momentarily blinded by the mud, but he soon had flung it from his eyes—and Jason soon felt the weakness born of hunger and exhaustion.

They rolled over in the black muck, Jason's hands seeking the throat of his opponent. Before he realized what the man was about, the Chinese had whipt out his revolver and fired it close to Jason's body. Jason felt stinging pain in his side.

But he was not, he thought, seriously hurt. He struggled for the weapon. It went off again. The bullet drove into the mud. Then he had the man's wrist, twisted it until muddy fingers dropped the weapon.

The Celestial, then, gouged pitilessly at his eyes. Jason flung back his head, knocked away the gouging fingers, drove his elbow into his opponent's middle. The man gasped, relaxed. Jason staggered up, looking for the dropped weapon with eyes that streamed tears of pain, blindingly.

If he could reach the gun, another second would end the menace of the Wizard of Life, if the centipede had not already——

"Ah, Mr. Wade, so we meet again!"

It was the voice of Iskandar, musical, softly deep, expressionless save for a hint of mockery.

Jason flung the stinging tears out of his eyes. He saw the man, standing two yards from him, a tall, immobile figure in his white laboratory jacket. The massive face was calm. A slight smile curved the full red lips with new cruelty. Under the bulging, ivory forehead, the long, jet-black eyes stared at him, inscrutable, with a magnetism in them, a fascination, a power.

A rifle, steadily held in the Wizard's slender, long-fingered, ivory hands, covered his heart.

The Chinese that the centipede had struck lay in the mire beside him, contorted, still quivering in his last agony. And the black monster was a little beyond, still terrible in the intense green light, flinging itself about in furious, aimless, spasmodic struggles; dying.

"I presume, Mr. Wade," the low, musical tones inquired, "that you share the hostile attitude toward my plans of your unfortunate friend, Mr. Gerald Travers?"

Iskandar chuckled, and Jason tensed with horror at memory of the sobbing thing in the pit, the gigantic red scorpion with the head of a man; at memory of Jerry's face, drawn with wo and unutterable, hopeless horror.

He reeled a little, with horror and weakness and pain; desperately he gathered his resources for a last attempt. . . .

He looked suddenly past the black almond eyes of Iskandar, at the colossal centipede still thrashing about. He tried to feign dismay. He shrank back, mouth sagging, hands lifting.

His acting must have been fairly convincing, for the black, sloping eyes wavered for an instant, toward the tossing, dying horror.

In that instant Jason lunged forward, pushed aside the rifle. Iskandar, recognizing the ruse, turned back. The rifle exploded, an instant too late. He went down into the mud, with Jason's hard fingers closing on his throat.

Savage exultation flamed up in Jason. He, no doubt, would be killed by the Wizard's swarming acolytes. Probably Tonia, too, would die, but she would be spared the hideously worse fate of metamorphosis into some unearthly shape of this monster's planning; and humanity would be free of the menace of his mad genius.

Avidly, Jason's fingers tightened on the smooth ivory throat.

Blinding darkness, then, exploded abruptly at the back of Jason's head. As he sank down into unconsciousness, he realized that the other Chinese, the one he had grappled, had recovered, clubbed him. Victory, so near, was gone.

WHEN he came to himself, he was lying in a narrow cell, on a cold metal floor. His wrists and ankles were shackled with steel. Complete darkness surrounded him; he found the cramping walls only by struggling about until he touched them. He was thirsty, gnawingly hungry—it was nearly two days since he had eaten. Mud of the jungle still caked his naked body, stiff and unpleasant. His head throbbed from a new bruise, where the Chinese had struck him. Pain stabbed from the shallow wound in his side.

For some hours he lay there, helplessly bound; still half dazed, sick with despair, he wondered dimly why he had not been killed. It must be, he knew, because the Wizard designed him for some fate less pleasant than immediate death.

He heard no footsteps without, but a deluge of cold salt water descended abruptly upon him; it stung the contusions on his head, the slight wound in his side, and shocked him out of his semi-daze. He was still flinging the water out of his eyes, when he looked up and saw the face of Iskandar.

There was, he now saw, a tiny high window in the wall of his cell, closely barred. Behind the bars, the face of the insidious Oriental had become visible, illuminated by a soft rosy light. It was the only thing he could see. A strange face, heavily impassive, pale as ivory. Red, full, girlish lips, whose curve more than hinted of cruelty. Prominent nose, with nostrils that flared a little. Enigmatic slanting eyes, dark as night, with a mockery in them, and a menace. Bulging pale forehead, beneath glistening black hair. Ivory throat, smooth as a woman's, still faintly marked with Jason's fingers.

The face was all he could see, lit with a dim, rosy light; the rest of his world was black.

The long, magnetic eyes stared down, until Jason felt that they could almost see his body, in the gloom of the cell. Then the full lips moved, and he heard the voice of Iskandar, impassive, deeply musical.

"Jason Wade, you hear me?"

"Yes," he whispered, half overcome with awe and dread inspired by the magnetic, inhuman power of those strange eyes.

"You have presumed, Mr. Wade, to oppose the plans I have made for the future history of humanity. You have injured my person. You have cost the life of a devoted servant. You have earned a punishment.

"And there is a precedent, Mr. Wade," the low, musical voice throbbed on, "for your punishment. There was another who ventured openly to dispute the power of Iskandar. You have seen his fate."

"You mean," Jason breathed, "you mean——?"

His voice failed him, out of sheer horror. Something in the uncanny silence of the cell, in the utter darkness, in the implacable, ivory mask staring at him through the bars, chilled him with a shuddering, consuming terror that he would never have felt if action, of any kind, had been possible.

Even before the slow, musically deep voice came again from the taunting red lips, he was sick with memory of the thing that had been Jerry Travers.

"You seem, Mr. Wade, to anticipate your sentence. You will be placed in the

chamber now occupied by Mr. Gerald Travers. The necessary injections will presently be given you. The radiations and the chemical content of the air will be duly regulated. In a very few months, Mr. Wade, you will have become a fit companion for Mr. Travers.

"Have you anything, Mr. Wade, to say for yourself?"

Jason might have cursed at that ivory, inhuman mask. He might, in his extremity, have pleaded. But his voice was gone, his throat rough and dry as parched leather. He was faint and giddy with horror. The impassive, insidious face seemed to whirl above him.

"Presumably, Mr. Wade," the low, deliberately suave voice mocked him, "your silence gives assent to the justice of your sentence. . . . You informed me, I believe, that you and Mr. Travers had been friends. It will be a pleasure to you, I hope, to renew acquaintance with him."

The ivory face turned half away, came back; the voice spoke again:

"Since you professed a concern for the young woman you saw in the other ray chamber, it might interest you to know that our preliminary research has been completed. In a few hours, now, Tonia Hope will be given the first injection, which will begin her transformation into the mother of the coming race."

Iskandar chuckled goldenly, said finally:

"Since the young woman appeared to display a reciprocal interest in you, Mr. Wade, perhaps I shall arrange a meeting between you, when you have the body of a scorpion, and Tonia Hope has become the first member of the new species."

The pallid ivory face vanished silently, then, from beyond the bars. And the rosy light faded. And Jason Wade was left in complete silence and utter darkness, a prey to unspeakable, soul-consuming horror as he waited for the execution of his sentence of inconceivable doom.

5. *"You Win . . . and Lose!"*

JASON was awake when the men came for him, some hours later. In the end of his cell a door was unlocked. Four stocky, impassive Chinese, armed with revolvers, made him drag himself out—their leader gave him curt orders in excellent English, with a slight Oxford accent.

Outside, in the gloomy, metal-walled hall, which was glaringly lit at intervals by naked electric lights, this man removed his leg irons and manacled Jason's right wrist to his own left.

"If you will please come with us, Mr. Wade," he said, "we shall have the honor to conduct you to the ray chamber."

Jason nodded, hopelessly. The man led the way along the hall, the three others following alertly.

The cell, Jason inferred, must have been in the depths of the floating island, beneath the floor or deck covered by nightmare life, for the guards led him into an automatic elevator that carried them swiftly up for some hundreds of feet.

In the hours of waiting, Jason had put down his horror. He was coldly resolved to snatch at the slightest chance of escape. Danger, now, was nothing. Death in any immediate form would be preferable to the hideous metamorphosis that waited in the ray chamber—and, once there, he would never have another opportunity to strike for Tonia Hope.

His guards, however, took extravagant precautions that he should have no opportunity to leave them. With every step forward, as he walked beside the squat, inscrutably silent yellow man fettered to

him, his heart sank. What opportunity, now, could come?

They left the elevator and traversed another hall, wider, less gloomy, illuminated at intervals by gray light that seeped through a roof of heavy glass. They were back, Jason knew, just under the top of the huge glass dome.

The men stopped, at last, in front of a door of solid steel, impregnable as the door of a vault. It was massively locked. The other men surrounded Jason and their leader, alert, cautious.

"Please wait a moment, Mr. Wade," requested the leader, courteously. "I must open this door. Beyond is the ray chamber, to which we have the distinction of conducting you."

Trembling, Jason looked away. Desperately his eyes roved for some weapon, for some hint, for *anything* that could offer the slightest hope of escape. There was nothing. . . . The bare metal wall of the passage. . . . Gray light filtering through the glass ceiling. . . . The four alert Celestials. . . .

The lock snapped; the door swung open; the green, terrible rays of change burst through the opening. Jason swayed with black despair. This was . . . the end. . . .

"It is my signal privilege," came the smooth English of the man fettered to him, "to invite you to honor the chamber before you with your distinguished presence."

Controlling a shudder of anticipatory horror, Jason looked ahead—into the eyes of Jerry Travers.

Beyond the massive steel door was the square, metal-walled tank, roofed with the vast sheet of glass through which he had first seen the horror. On the metal floor, in a foully reeking litter of indescribable filth, sprawled the brain-wrecking nightmare that once had been his friend.

A colossal scorpion, its horny-plated, crimson body, larger than a man's, glistened strangely in the terrible green light. The formidable pincers, powerful enough to clip a man's leg in twain, were clashing restlessly. The slender, crimson tail, barbed with a black, venomous fang, slashed back and forth in the disgusting filth upon the floor, as if with agony or rage.

But it was the head of it, the face, that riveted Jason's gaze with soul-chilling dread . . . the head of Jerry Travers, matted with shaggy red hair, growing out of that fearful body . . . the face of Jerry Travers, haggard and drawn and twisted with unutterable agony, with inconceivable horror, with flaming, deathless hate.

Hate. . . .

Hate burned in the blue eyes, through the shadows of suffering and horror and despair. It was a terrific, malignant, consuming fire. It was all that kept this creature alive, overwhelming hatred for Iskandar.

Jason had started mechanically forward. He stopped, was dazed, reeling, with the horror of what he saw. He tried to tear his gaze away from the thing in the chamber. But the eyes of Jerry Travers held him, with a hideous fascination.

He saw recognition come into those dreadful orbs—and hope. Hope flamed up, beside the hate. A desperate resolution came abruptly to Jason, an insane resolution. He did not stop to weigh it. He had suffered too long the agony of inaction. He must fight again, even if he died. He must fight, because he would never have another chance.

He leaned into the door and shouted out imperatively: "Come, Jerry! Come out! You can fight!"

And he jabbed a short, vicious left into the body of the man fettered to him, and flung his weight abruptly against him, so that they both toppled against the open door.

Even as he shouted, he saw hope burn stronger in those suffering eyes, beside the hate. He saw understanding there, and savage decision.

The stocky yellow man screamed in instant terror, and tried to slam the door. Jason kept his body and the body of their leader against it. The man chained to him gasped; he struggled, pulling at his revolver. Jason caught him on the jaw with a second short, stiff punch with his free arm, that dazed the man and flung him back against the door so heavily that his head cracked against the metal. He went down limply, so that his body still propped open the door.

IT ALL happened in a few seconds.

The other man dragged at Jason and the lax body; he butted and kicked and swung at them; doggedly he kept his place, for the one vital moment. One of them dropped back, hauled out his revolver, and opened fire.

Jason ducked his head and jerked another of the yellow men down upon him, free arm hooked about his throat, so that their bodies and that of the dead man still propped the door open. A bullet spattered on the metal by his head.

The red-armored thing, then, came scuttling through the door. It moved with a fearful, deadly quickness — no more than three seconds, perhaps, had passed since Jason's call. It sprang upon the struggling man that Jason had pulled down. He shrieked bubblingly, and was silent.

The two others backed away, livid with terror, shooting furiously.

The thing rushed at one of them. Its red armor made a strange clatter on the metal floor. The Chinese fell before it; the tapering, slender sting arched, touched him; he began a scream that ended in a strange rasping whistle.

The one survivor dropped his revolver and fled. He vanished into an intersecting passage. He would, Jason knew, spread the alarm.

The red creature left the body of its second victim. The human head looked about, a little awkwardly, for its neck was not very flexible. Seeing that the remaining Chinese had gone, it came back to Jason, clattering on the metal floor.

Jason was still leaning against the great door, burdened with the corpse chained to his right wrist; he was panting, trembling with weakness of hunger and exhaustion, dizzy with a confusion of elation and horror.

The thing stopped in front of him. He shuddered, and recoiled from it, dragging the dead man. The drawn lips of the head moved, then. Sound came from them—harsh, strange whisperings, dry, rusty, hideous. It was a moment before Jason realized that it was *speaking*.

"Jason Wade," he distinguished the weirdly uttered syllables. "Old Jason. Remember me? 'Course you remember me! You call me Jerry! Say, don't you remember me? I'm Jerry Travers."

Jason fought down his horror and steadied himself against the massive door. He forced himself to speak, though the voice from his husky throat was almost as harsh and dry as the uncanny voice of the other.

"Certainly I remember you, Jerry."

That was all that came to him. He tried to get a grip on himself. Now was the time to strike, before the alarm had spread. The one surviving Chinese would warn the Wizard—but this thing that had

been Jerry Travers could fight. Together, if they moved before it was too late . . .

The terrible, painful whisper was coming again:

"The Wizard! Where is he? You know, Jason, where the Wizard is?"

"I think I do," Jason forced out the whisper. "I think I can find him. But that man that ran away will give the warning. We must be quick. . . . But wait. I must find the keys, and unfasten myself from this dead man."

He tried to be very plain. He was sure that the brain of Jerry Travers had cracked a little. Nor was that strange—the wonder was that he was not insane or dead.

Jason bent; he began searching the limp body beside him.

The dreadful, agonized whisper came to him again.

"Come, Jason. Take me to the Wizard. I'm going to kill him, Jason. I've waited to kill him. Waited, waited——"

The dry, harsh rustlings trailed away. The thing sobbed with eagerness and hate, and great tears burst out of the tortured eyes. Jason found a ring of keys, and began trying them in his manacles. Presently the whisper came again:

"The Wizard changed me, Jason. You can see how the Wizard changed me. My body feels so strange, Jason! And it pains. . . . And he left May to watch me, Jason. He left her over the glass. She went mad, Jason. She went mad, watching me. I'm going to kill him, Jason. I've waited——"

The whisper died again, into a hiss of hate.

The manacles came open, then, and Jason dropped the inert body fom him. He snatched up two revolvers from the floor, and searched until he found a box of cartridges in the pockets of the man he had killed.

"Come, Jerry. We must find the Wizard."

He started at a trot down the hall, and the red thing clattered after him.

A SHOUT of warning met them, and a little group of armed yellow men, nervously descending a stair. Jason threw up one of his revolvers. Though by no means a two-gun man, he shot accurately enough, if rather deliberately, with one. Four shots dropped three men on the stair in that many seconds.

The Chinese did not return his fire. Their scattering volley of shots was fired at the thing that had been Jerry Travers. It scuttled swiftly ahead of him, and leapt up the stair into the little knot of men. Its lashing sting touched one, then another. They broke in screaming panic as it came among them, and fled up the stair, leaving five men dead.

The scuttling horror followed up the steps. Jason ran after it.

The head of Jerry Travers, he saw, had been hit. One cheek was laid open, hideously, to the teeth. Dark blood was dripping from a long furrow on the temple. Other shots, he knew, must have struck the red-armored body, though it yet showed no weakness.

They came, at the top of the stair, into a passage vaguely familiar to Jason. It was the one, he recalled after a moment, that he had traversed when Iskandar took him to look through the glass at this battling abnormality and at Tonia Hope.

He ran beside the scuttling thing, calling:

"This way, Jerry! Come this way, and I think we shall find the Wizard." And he asked, huskily, "Jerry, are you hurt?"

Harsh, rusty, the reply whispered back:

"Nothing. No matter—if we find the Wizard. Just find the Wizard, Jason! . . . He made May watch me change. May

was my wife, Jason. He made her watch. . . ."

They came to the steps that led up to the strange tower room, that was the bridge of this amazing ship. It was there that Jason had first seen Iskandar, there that he hoped to find him again.

At the top of the steps he heard a gasping, hoarse cry of consternation. A door slammed. Jason ran up the steps, revolvers ready. The red monstrosity clattered after him, with horrific eagerness.

Jason tried the door. It was locked. He held the muzzle of a revolver a foot from the catch, and fired three times. Lead and bits of metal stung his body. He hurled his weight against the door, gun ready. It flung open. He sprawled forward on his face.

The fall saved his life, for Jabez Head and his gorilla-like bodyguard, Hap Nino, were waiting behind the door. Jabez had a heavy revolver; Hap, a short, ugly automatic. They fired through the door, where his body would have been if he had not fallen.

From the floor, he shot twice.

Hap Nino slumped slowly down upon his face. Jabez Head flung a thin hand up to his small greenish eyes; and his hard voice shouted, loudly, the one odd word, "Tarnation!" He tottered back over the inert body of Hap Nino and fell at full length, face up, upon a priceless Persian rug.

The scuttling terror leapt over Jason. It was in the middle of the room before he could scramble to his feet.

Perfectly motionless, across the room, stood the man who called himself Iskandar, Wizard of Life. His slender ivory hands were fixed on the spokes of a heavy wheel of brass, by the wall.

The red horror was rushing at him.

The scene was graven on Jason's memory: The great, strange room, rich with soft-hued Eastern carpets; walls tapestried with scarlet dragons; air faintly fragrant with incense; immense, fantastic silver lamps swinging from the emerald vault of the ceiling; the green jade Buddha squatting, serenely contemplative, in its niche. The many wide windows, looking out upon the flattened crown of the immense glass dome; upon barracks, hangars, radio station; upon the three strange pylons with the ominous globes of bright argent—weapons of unknown power. Beyond the dome, the slate-gray sea, still wild, heaving in mountainous, white-crested seas; the horizons above it still gray with storm; the wind yet roaring, laden with freezing mist.

Inside the room, by the brass wheel, Iskandar stood impassively watching the scuttling, red-plated horror that he had made. The man, it seemed to Jason, was motionless as a statue of ivory. His tall, purple-robed body stood rigid. His long, slanted, night-black eyes were fixed upon the advancing horror, inscrutable as ever.

It leapt at him, after what had seemed to Jason an eternity of static tension, though it must have been the merest instant.

Iskandar's long-fingered, ivory hand spun the brass wheel.

He went down, beneath the spring. He did not struggle. After the slender, seeking barb had found him, after Jason had thought him dead, his voice spoke out, strong and expressionless and richly deep as ever:

"You win, Mr. Wade. And lose——"

His words were cut off, with an abrupt little catch. His ivory body grew rigid, quivered convulsively, then ceased to move.

The red monstrosity remained upon him, the black barb of the sting driven

into his side. Jason spoke to it. It did not move, and he walked to it.

The head of Jerry Travers was dead. It sagged forward, on its short neck, from the red, fearful body. Black blood was slowly dripping from it, upon the richly brocaded purple robe. Red hair had fallen against the gash in the temple; it was stuck there, glued with blood.

The eyes were open. The grief was gone from them, and the agony, and the unspeakable hate. They were blue and wide. They seemed to smile again, as Jason remembered them smiling on the campus at Yale. He closed them, tenderly.

He hastened, then, out of the tower room. He remembered the brass wheel the Wizard had spun—and his dying words, with a mockery in them:

"You win, Mr. Wade. And lose——"

What he had done, Jason could not guess, but it was something, he knew, aimed at him—or at Tonia Hope. He ran down the hall, toward the little room through whose glass floor he had looked down into the ray chamber where the girl had been imprisoned.

6. *The Isle's End*

THE lookout on the *U. S. S. Darnholt,* six hours later, sighted a gray amphibian airplane. The diminutive destroyer, crusted with ice and brine, was wallowing into the wind, against towering seas. The airplane, flying low over the plunging leaden ocean, was evidently crippled.

Twice it circled the destroyer, then came down. Swiftly it broke up in the mad green water, but a boat succeeded in taking away the pilot and his passenger. Jason Wade was the pilot. The passenger was Tonia Hope.

After the two had been warmed and dried and filled with hot food and allowed a little sleep, Captain Wilkins had them brought to the tossing bridge. A lean, oldish man was the captain, with sharply jutting jaw and a mouth like a trap; but beyond the frosty sternness of his blue eyes shone a hint of geniality.

Jason Wade was haggard, and dead-weary. He wore bandages over the contusions on his head, as well as upon the insignificant flesh wound in his side. His gray eyes were still a little bloodshot, with fatigue. But they smiled as they rested on the girl by him.

Tonia Hope, he thought, was lovelier than she had ever been—even in Captain Wilkins' pink pajamas. Slim and tall she was, her skin very white, her hair a glory of fine-spun gold. Her wide blue eyes were shadowed still with the darkness of horror and tragedy; her face was still pallid and strained. But the shadow of horror, Jason knew, would fade. She still loved him. She still could laugh. Her brightly vivacious, generous temper was unchanged. She had been very much concerned over Jason's slight wounds, and had helped to dress them.

In response to Captain Wilkins' questions, Jason told his amazing story. He was doubtful, at first, and hesitant, expecting unbelief. The old officer encouraged him, told him finally:

"Don't be afraid to tell it all, Mr. Wade. You see, Washington has come on some information about the thing. The *Darnholt* was dispatched to investigate a menace to navigation existing in the North Pacific."

"This is the Pacific?"

"Yes. You must have been flown across the continent, Mr. Wade, after your abduction. . . . There have been rumors of some unusual activity in the Orient. And two trans-Pacific flyers and a Danish tramp have been recently lost in these waters."

"They must have stumbled on the thing," said Jason. "They must have been destroyed with whatever force came from those silver globes. The globes were weapons, Iskandar said."

"We had come to investigate," repeated the officer, "but you seem to have saved us the trouble——"

"It was Jerry Travers," Jason disclaimed credit, "or the creature that had been Jerry. He killed Iskandar. I couldn't have done a thing, alone."

"The structure, the floating island, as you call it, was sunk, you say? How, Mr. Wade?"

"Iskandar turned a wheel, before he died," said Jason. "That opened seacocks, I suppose, and flooded the lower compartments. Anyhow, the structure began to list and settle, at once."

"It was after that, that you got possession of the plane?"

"Yes. The Chinese were pretty much disorganized by what had happened. They must have lived in terror of the—of Jerry Travers. Jerry died on the body of Iskandar. But the top of the dome was already deserted—the warning had spread. And I was left with a good supply of arms."

"He fought to get me out of the horrid little place I was locked in, Captain," put in Tonia Hope, with admiration in her soft voice. She added, in a quieter tone, "There were two men dead in the hall, when he let me out."

Jason flushed a little at the admiration in the girl's soft voice; he shook his head, protestingly.

"You see," he explained, "I already had the keys I had taken from my jailer. One of them happened to fit. . . . But we couldn't have got away," he added, "if the men hadn't been frightened and disorganized."

"Mr. Wade had to fight again," Tonia insisted on saying, with a laughingly defiant look at Jason, "to get the plane. There were Chinese in the hangar. They attacked us."

"That's where Tonia got *her* man," Jason said. "She took a revolver and blazed away like a veteran, while I was getting the motor started."

"You know *I* didn't kill any man," protested the girl, with an indignant smile. "Why, I just shot at the glass in front of them!"

Captain Wilkins put in a question:

"Were there any other survivors?"

"I think not, Captain," said Jason. "No other plane came away; and nothing could have floated, in that vortex. The structure was listing steeply before we took off. It went down in a few minutes, almost on edge. It left a white whirlpool; and great bubbles of air came up. I'm sure nobody lived.

"And we wouldn't have been alive much longer, Captain," Jason added, gratefully, "if you hadn't come in sight. The Chinese shot at us a few times as we were getting away. They put a hole in one of the gas tanks. I tried to plug it, but we were about out when we saw you."

"So I can radio Washington," observed Captain Wilkins, "that the new Asiatic menace has ceased to exist, thanks to Jason Wade."

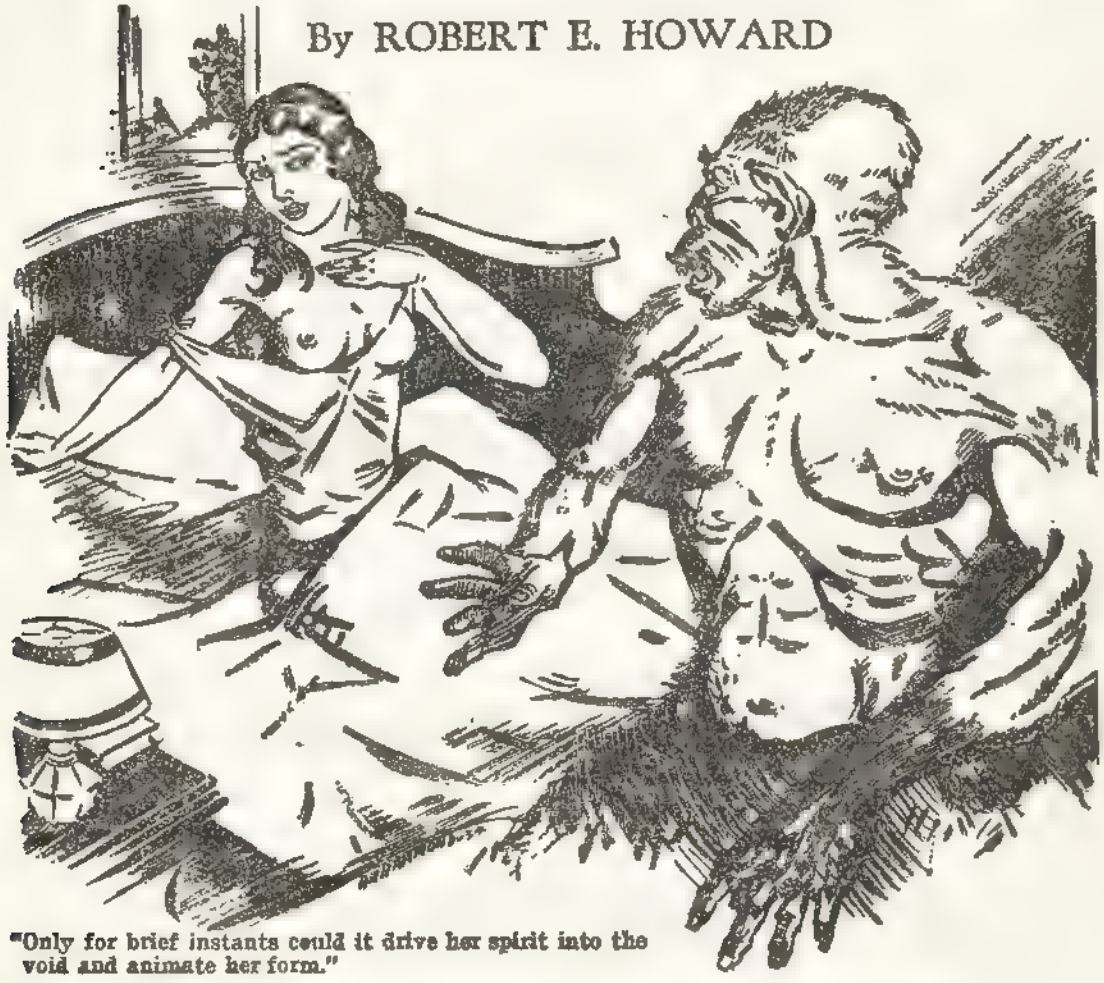
"No," insisted Jason; "thanks to Jerry Travers. And," he requested, "please radio Mrs. Justina Todd, at New York, that her niece is free."

"No, Captain," protested Tonia Hope, with a hint of laughter in her wide blue eyes. "Don't say free; say permanently attached. Because she's going to be, Captain, just as soon as you have time to do the attaching."

And Jason, smiling at her with tired eyes, nodded.

The Haunter of the Ring

By ROBERT E. HOWARD



"Only for brief instants could it drive her spirit into the void and animate her form."

A strange story of dark powers and occult evil, by the author of "Black Colossus"

AS I entered John Kirowan's study I was too much engrossed in my own thoughts to notice, at first, the haggard appearance of his visitor, a big, handsome young fellow well known to me.

"Hello, Kirowan," I greeted. "Hello, Gordon. Haven't seen you for quite a while. How's Evelyn?" And before he could answer, still on the crest of the enthusiasm which had brought me there, I exclaimed: "Look here, you fellows, I've got something that will make you stare! I got it from that robber Ahmed Mektub, and I paid high for it, but it's worth it. Look!" From under my coat I drew the jewel-hilted Afghan dagger which had fascinated me as a collector of rare weapons.

Kirowan, familiar with my passion, showed only polite interest, but the effect on Gordon was shocking.

With a strangled cry he sprang up and backward, knocking the chair clattering

to the floor. Fists clenched and countenance livid he faced me, crying: "Keep back! Get away from me, or——"

I was frozen in my tracks.

"What in the——" I began bewilderedly, when Gordon, with another amazing change of attitude, dropped into a chair and sank his head in his hands. I saw his heavy shoulders quiver. I stared helplessly from him to Kirowan, who seemed equally dumfounded.

"Is he drunk?" I asked.

Kirowan shook his head, and filling a brandy glass, offered it to the man. Gordon looked up with haggard eyes, seized the drink and gulped it down like a man half famished. Then he straightened up and looked at us shamefacedly.

"I'm sorry I went off my handle, O'Donnel," he said. "It was the unexpected shock of you drawing that knife."

"Well," I retorted, with some disgust, "I suppose you thought I was going to stab you with it!"

"Yes, I did!" Then, at the utterly blank expression on my face, he added: "Oh, I didn't actually *think* that; at least, I didn't reach that conclusion by any process of reasoning. It was just the blind primitive instinct of a hunted man, against whom anyone's hand may be turned."

His strange words and the despairing way he said them sent a queer shiver of nameless apprehension down my spine.

"What are you talking about?" I demanded uneasily. "Hunted? For what? You never committed a crime in your life."

"Not in this life, perhaps," he muttered.

"What do you mean?"

"What if retribution for a black crime committed in a previous life were hounding me?" he muttered.

"That's nonsense," I snorted.

"Oh, is it?" he exclaimed, stung. "Did you ever hear of my great-grandfather, Sir Richard Gordon of Argyle?"

"Sure; but what's that got to do with——"

"You've seen his portrait: doesn't it resemble me?"

"Well, yes," I admitted, "except that your expression is frank and wholesome whereas his is crafty and cruel."

"He murdered his wife," answered Gordon. "Suppose the theory of reincarnation were true? Why shouldn't a man suffer in one life for a crime committed in another?"

"You mean you think you are the reincarnation of your great-grandfather? Of all the fantastic—well, since he killed his wife, I suppose you'll be expecting Evelyn to murder you!" This last was delivered in searing sarcasm, as I thought of the sweet, gentle girl Gordon had married. His answer stunned me.

"My wife," he said slowly, "has tried to kill me three times in the past week."

There was no reply to that. I glanced helplessly at John Kirowan. He sat in his customary position, chin resting on his strong, slim hands; his white face was immobile, but his dark eyes gleamed with interest. In the silence I heard a clock ticking like a death-watch.

"Tell us the full story, Gordon," suggested Kirowan, and his calm, even voice was like a knife that cut a strangling, relieving the unreal tension.

"You know we've been married less than a year," Gordon began, plunging into the tale as though he were bursting for utterance; his words stumbled and tripped over one another. "All couples have spats, of course, but we've never had any real quarrels. Evelyn is the best-natured girl in the world.

"The first thing out of the ordinary occurred about a week ago. We had

driven up in the mountains, left the car, and were wandering around picking wild flowers. At last we came to a steep slope, some thirty feet in height, and Evelyn called my attention to the flowers which grew thickly at the foot. I was looking over the edge and wondering if I could climb down without tearing my clothes to ribbons, when I felt a violent shove from behind that toppled me over.

"If it had been a sheer cliff, I'd have broken my neck. As it was, I went tumbling down, rolling and sliding, and brought up at the bottom scratched and bruised, with my garments in rags. I looked up and saw Evelyn staring down, apparently frightened half out of her wits.

" 'Oh Jim!' she cried. 'Are you hurt? How came you to fall?'

"It was on the tip of my tongue to tell her that there was such a thing as carrying a joke too far, but these words checked me. I decided that she must have stumbled against me unintentionally, and actually didn't know it was she who precipitated me down the slope.

"So I laughed it off, and went home. She made a great fuss over me, insisted on swabbing my scratches with iodine, and lectured me for my carelessness! I hadn't the heart to tell her it was her fault.

"But four days later, the next thing happened. I was walking along our driveway, when I saw her coming up it in the automobile. I stepped out on the grass to let her by, as there isn't any curb along the driveway. She was smiling as she approached me, and slowed down the car, as if to speak to me. Then, just before she reached me, a most horrible change came over her expression. Without warning the car leaped at me like a living thing as she drove her foot down on the accelerator. Only a frantic leap backward saved me from being ground under the wheels. The car shot across the lawn and crashed into a tree. I ran to it and found Evelyn dazed and hysterical, but unhurt. She babbled of losing control of the machine.

"I carried her into the house and sent for Doctor Donnelly. He found nothing seriously wrong with her, and attributed her dazed condition to fright and shock. Within half an hour she regained her normal senses, but she's refused to touch the wheel since. Strange to say, she seemed less frightened on her own account than on mine. She seemed vaguely to know that she'd nearly run me down, and grew hysterical again when she spoke of it. Yet she seemed to take it for granted that I knew the machine had got out of her control. But I distinctly saw her wrench the wheel around, and I know she deliberately tried to hit me—why, God alone knows.

"Still I refused to let my mind follow the channel it was getting into. Evelyn had never given any evidence of any psychological weakness or 'nerves'; she's always been a level-headed girl, wholesome and natural. But I began to think she was subject to crazy impulses. Most of us have felt the impulse to leap from tall buildings. And sometimes a person feels a blind, childish and utterly reasonless urge to harm someone. We pick up a pistol, and the thought suddenly enters our mind how easy it would be to send our friend, who sits smiling and unaware, into eternity with a touch of the trigger. Of course we don't do it, but the impulse is there. So I thought perhaps some lack of mental discipline made Evelyn susceptible to these unguided impulses, and unable to control them."

"Nonsense," I broke in. "I've known her since she was a baby. If she has any

such trait, she's developed it since she married you."

It was an unfortunate remark. Gordon caught it up with a despairing gleam in his eyes. "That's just it—since she married me! It's a curse — a black, ghastly curse, crawling like a serpent out of the past! I tell you, I was Richard Gordon and she—she was Lady Elizabeth, his murdered wife!" His voice sank to a blood-freezing whisper.

I shuddered; it is an awful thing to look upon the ruin of a keen clean brain, and such I was certain that I surveyed in James Gordon. Why or how, or by what grisly chance it had come about I could not say, but I was certain the man was mad.

"You spoke of three attempts." It was John Kirowan's voice again, calm and stable amid the gathering webs of horror and unreality.

"Look here!" Gordon lifted his arm, drew back the sleeve and displayed a bandage, the cryptic significance of which was intolerable.

"I came into the bathroom this morning looking for my razor," he said. "I found Evelyn just on the point of using my best shaving implement for some feminine purpose—to cut out a pattern, or something. Like many women she can't seem to realize the difference between a razor and a butcher-knife or a pair of shears.

"I was a bit irritated, and I said: 'Evelyn, how many times have I told you not to use my razors for such things? Bring it here; I'll give you my pocket-knife.'

" 'I'm sorry, Jim,' she said. 'I didn't know it would hurt the razor. Here it is.'

"She was advancing, holding the open razor toward me. I reached for it—then something warned me. It was the same look in her eyes, just as I had seen it the day she nearly ran over me. That was all that saved my life, for I instinctively threw up my hand just as she slashed at my throat with all her power. The blade gashed my arm as you see, before I caught her wrist. For an instant she fought me like a wild thing; her slender body was taut as steel beneath my hands. Then she went limp and the look in her eyes was replaced by a strange dazed expression. The razor slipped out of her fingers.

"I let go of her and she stood swaying as if about to faint. I went to the lavatory — my wound was bleeding in a beastly fashion — and the next thing I heard her cry out, and she was hovering over me.

" 'Jim!' she cried. 'How did you cut yourself so terribly?' "

GORDON shook his head and sighed heavily. "I guess I was a bit out of my head. My self-control snapped.

" 'Don't keep up this pretense, Evelyn,' I said. 'God knows what's got into you, but you know as well as I that you've tried to kill me three times in the past week.'

"She recoiled as if I'd struck her, catching at her breast and staring at me as if at a ghost. She didn't say a word—and just what I said I don't remember. But when I finished I left her standing there white and still as a marble statue. I got my arm bandaged at a drug store, and then came over here, not knowing what else to do.

"Kirowan—O'Donnel—it's damnable! Either my wife is subject to fits of insanity——" He choked on the word. "No, I can't believe it. Ordinarily her eyes are too clear and level—too utterly sane. But every time she has an opportunity to harm

me, she seems to become a temporary maniac."

He beat his fists together in his impotence and agony.

"But it isn't insanity! I used to work in a psychopathic ward, and I've seen every form of mental unbalance. My wife is *not* insane!"

"Then what——" I began, but he turned haggard eyes on me.

"Only one alternative remains," he answered. "It is the old curse—from the days when I walked the earth with a heart as black as hell's darkest pits, and did evil in the sight of man and of God. *She* knows, in fleeting snatches of memory. People have *seen* before — have glimpsed forbidden things in momentary liftings of the veil which bars life from life. She was Elizabeth Douglas, the ill-fated bride of Richard Gordon, whom he murdered in jealous frenzy, and the vengeance is hers. I shall die by her hands, as it was meant to be. And she——" he bowed his head in his hands.

"Just a moment." It was Kirowan again. "You have mentioned a strange look in your wife's eyes. What sort of a look? Was it of maniacal frenzy?"

Gordon shook his head. "It was an utter blankness. All the life and intelligence simply vanished, leaving her eyes dark wells of emptiness."

Kirowan nodded, and asked a seemingly irrelevant question. "Have you any enemies?"

"Not that I know of."

"You forget Joseph Roelocke," I said. "I can't imagine that elegant sophisticate going to the trouble of doing you actual harm, but I have an idea that if he could discomfort you without any physical effort on his part, he'd do it with a right good will."

Kirowan turned on me an eye that had suddenly become piercing.

"And who is this Joseph Roelocke?"

"A young exquisite who came into Evelyn's life and nearly rushed her off her feet for a while. But in the end she came back to her first love—Gordon here. Roelocke took it pretty hard. For all his suaveness there's a streak of violence and passion in the man that might have cropped out but for his infernal indolence and blasé indifference."

"Oh, there's nothing to be said against Roelocke," interrupted Gordon impatiently. "He must know that Evelyn never really loved him. He merely fascinated her temporarily with his romantic Latin air."

"Not exactly Latin, Jim," I protested. "Roelocke does look foreign, but it isn't Latin. It's almost Oriental."

"Well, what has Roelocke to do with this matter?" Gordon snarled with the irascibility of frayed nerves. "He's been as friendly as a man could be since Evelyn and I were married. In fact, only a week ago he sent her a ring which he said was a peace-offering and a belated wedding gift; said that after all, her jilting him was a greater misfortune for her than it was for him—the conceited jackass!"

"A ring?" Kirowan had suddenly come to life; it was as if something hard and steely had been sounded in him. "What sort of a ring?"

"Oh, a fantastic thing—copper, made like a scaly snake coiled three times, with its tail in its mouth and yellow jewels for eyes. I gather he picked it up somewhere in Hungary."

"He has traveled a great deal in Hungary?"

Gordon looked surprized at this questioning, but answered: "Why, apparently the man's traveled everywhere. I put him down as the pampered son of a millionaire. He never did any work, so far as I know."

"He's a great student," I put in. "I've been up to his apartment several times, and I never saw such a collection of books——"

Gordon leaped to his feet with an oath. "Are we all crazy?" he cried. "I came up here hoping to get some help—and you fellows fall to talking of Joseph Roelocke. I'll go to Doctor Donnelly——"

"Wait!" Kirowan stretched out a detaining hand. "If you don't mind, we'll go over to your house. I'd like to talk to your wife."

Gordon dumbly acquiesced. Harried and haunted by grisly forebodings, he knew not which way to turn, and welcomed anything that promised aid.

We drove over in his car, and scarcely a word was spoken on the way. Gordon was sunk in moody ruminations, and Kirowan had withdrawn himself into some strange aloof domain of thought beyond my ken. He sat like a statue, his dark vital eyes staring into space, not blankly, but as one who looks with understanding into some far realm.

Though I counted the man as my best friend, I knew but little of his past. He had come into my life as abruptly and unannounced as Joseph Roelocke had come into the life of Evelyn Ash. I had met him at the Wanderer's Club, which is composed of the drift of the world, travelers, eccentrics, and all manner of men whose paths lie outside the beaten tracks of life. I had been attracted to him, and intrigued by his strange powers and deep knowledge. I vaguely knew that he was the black sheep younger son of a titled Irish family, and that he had walked many strange ways. Gordon's mention of Hungary struck a chord in my memory; one phase of his life Kirowan had once let drop, fragmentarily. I only knew that he had once suffered a bitter grief and a savage wrong, and that it had been in Hungary. But the nature of the episode I did not know.

At Gordon's house Evelyn met us calmly, showing inner agitation only by the over-restraint of her manner. I saw the beseeching look she stole at her husband. She was a slender, soft-spoken girl, whose dark eyes were always vibrant and alight with emotion. That child try to murder her adored husband? The idea was monstrous. Again I was convinced that James Gordon himself was deranged.

Following Kirowan's lead, we made a pretense of small talk, as if we had casually dropped in, but I felt that Evelyn was not deceived. Our conversation rang false and hollow, and presently Kirowan said: "Mrs. Gordon, that is a remarkable ring you are wearing. Do you mind if I look at it?"

"I'll have to give you my hand," she laughed. "I've been trying to get it off today, and it won't come off."

She held out her slim white hand for Kirowan's inspection, and his face was immobile as he looked at the metal snake that coiled about her slim finger. He did not touch it. I myself was aware of an unaccountable repulsion. There was something almost obscene about that dull copperish reptile wound about the girl's white finger.

"It's evil-looking, isn't it?" She involuntarily shivered. "At first I liked it, but now I can hardly bear to look at it. If I can get it off I intend to return it to Joseph—Mr. Roelocke."

Kirowan was about to make some reply, when the door-bell rang. Gordon jumped as if shot, and Evelyn rose quickly.

"I'll answer it, Jim — I know who it is."

She returned an instant later with two more mutual friends, those inseparable

cronies, Doctor Donnelly, whose burly body, jovial manner and booming voice were combined with as keen a brain as any in the profession, and Bill Bain, elderly, lean, wiry, acidly witty. Both were old friends of the Ash family. Doctor Donnelly had ushered Evelyn into the world, and Bain was always Uncle Bill to her.

"Howdy, Jim! Howdy, Mr. Kirowan!" roared Donnelly. "Hey, O'Donnel, have you got any firearms with you? Last time you nearly blew my head off showing me an old flintlock pistol that wasn't supposed to be loaded——"

"Doctor Donnelly!"

We all turned. Evelyn was standing beside a wide table, holding it as if for support. Her face was white. Our badinage ceased instantly. A sudden tension was in the air.

"Doctor Donnelly," she repeated, holding her voice steady by an effort, "I sent for you and Uncle Bill—for the same reason for which I know Jim has brought Mr. Kirowan and Michael. There is a matter Jim and I can no longer deal with alone. There is something between us—something black and ghastly and terrible."

"What are you talking about, girl?" All the levity was gone from Donnelly's great voice.

"My husband——" She choked, then went blindly on: "My husband has accused me of trying to murder him."

The silence that fell was broken by Bain's sudden and energetic rise. His eyes blazed and his fists quivered.

"You young pup!" he shouted at Gordon. "I'll knock the living daylights——"

"Sit down, Bill!" Donnelly's huge hand crushed his smaller companion back into his chair. "No use goin' off half cocked. Go ahead, honey."

"We need help. We can not carry this thing alone." A shadow crossed her comely face. "This morning Jim's arm was badly cut. He said I did it. I don't know. I was handing him the razor. Then I must have fainted. At least, everything faded away. When I came to myself he was washing his arm in the lavatory—and—and he accused me of trying to kill him."

"Why, the young fool!" barked the belligerent Bain. "Hasn't he sense enough to know that if you did cut him, it was an accident?"

"Shut up, won't you?" snorted Donnelly. "Honey, did you say you fainted? That isn't like you."

"I've been having fainting spells," she answered. "The first time was when we were in the mountains and Jim fell down a cliff. We were standing on the edge—then everything went black, and when my sight cleared, he was rolling down the slope." She shuddered at the recollection.

"Then when I lost control of the car and it crashed into the tree. You remember—Jim called you over."

Doctor Donnelly nodded his head ponderously.

"I don't remember you ever having fainting spells before."

"But Jim says I pushed him over the cliff!" she cried hysterically. "He says I tried to run him down in the car! He says I purposely slashed him with the razor!"

Doctor Donnelly turned perplexedly toward the wretched Gordon.

"How about it, son?"

"God help me," Gordon burst out in agony; "it's true!"

"Why, you lying hound!" It was Bain who gave tongue, leaping again to his feet. "If you want a divorce, why don't

you get it in a decent way, instead of resorting to these despicable tactics——"

"Damn you!" roared Gordon, lunging up, and losing control of himself completely. "If you say that I'll tear your jugular out!"

Evelyn screamed; Donnelly grabbed Bain ponderously and banged him back into his chair with no overly gentle touch, and Kirowan laid a hand lightly on Gordon's shoulder. The man seemed to crumple into himself. He sank back into his chair and held out his hands gropingly toward his wife.

"Evelyn," he said, his voice thick with laboring emotion, "you know I love you. I feel like a dog. But God help me, it's true. If we go on this way, I'll be a dead man, and you——"

"Don't say it!" she screamed. "I know you wouldn't lie to me, Jim. If you say I tried to kill you, I know I did. But I swear, Jim, I didn't do it consciously. Oh, I must be going mad! That's why my dreams have been so wild and terrifying lately——"

"Of what have you dreamed, Mrs. Gordon?" asked Kirowan gently.

She pressed her hands to her temples and stared dully at him, as if only half comprehending.

"A black thing," she muttered. "A horrible faceless black thing that mows and mumbles and paws over me with apish hands. I dream of it every night. And in the daytime I try to kill the only man I ever loved. I'm going mad! Maybe I'm already crazy and don't know it."

"CALM yourself, honey." To Doctor Donnelly, with all his science, it was only another case of feminine hysteria. His matter-of-fact voice seemed to soothe her, and she sighed and drew a weary hand through her damp locks.

"We'll talk this all over, and everything's goin' to be okay," he said, drawing a thick cigar from his vest pocket. "Gimme a match, honey."

She began mechanically to feel about the table, and just as mechanically Gordon said: "There are matches in the drawer, Evelyn."

She opened the drawer and began groping in it, when suddenly, as if struck by recollection and intuition, Gordon sprang up, white-faced, and shouted: "No, no! Don't open that drawer—don't——"

Even as he voiced that urgent cry, she stiffened, as if at the feel of something in the drawer. Her change of expression held us all frozen, even Kirowan. The vital intelligence vanished from her eyes like a blown-out flame, and into them came the look Gordon had described as blank. The term was descriptive. Her beautiful eyes were dark wells of emptiness, as if the soul had been withdrawn from behind them.

Her hand came out of the drawer holding a pistol, and she fired point-blank. Gordon reeled with a groan and went down, blood starting from his head. For a flashing instant she looked down stupidly at the smoking gun in her hand, like one suddenly waking from a nightmare. Then her wild scream of agony smote our ears.

"Oh God, I've killed him! Jim! *Jim!*"

She reached him before any of us, throwing herself on her knees and cradling his bloody head in her arms, while she sobbed in an unbearable passion of horror and anguish. The emptiness was gone from her eyes; they were alive and dilated with grief and terror.

I was making toward my prostrate friend with Donnelly and Bain, but Kirowan caught my arm. His face was no

longer immobile; his eyes glittered with a controlled savagery.

"Leave him to them!" he snarled. "We are hunters, not healers! Lead me to the house of Joseph Roelocke!"

I did not question him. We drove there in Gordon's car. I had the wheel, and something about the grim face of my companion caused me to hurl the machine recklessly through the traffic. I had the sensation of being part of a tragic drama which was hurtling with headlong speed toward a terrible climax.

I wrenched the car to a grinding halt at the curb before the building where Roelocke lived in a bizarre apartment high above the city. The very elevator that shot us skyward seemed imbued with something of Kirowan's driving urge for haste. I pointed out Roelocke's door, and he cast it open without knocking and shouldered his way in. I was close at his heels.

ROELOCKE, in a dressing-gown of Chinese silk worked with dragons, was lounging on a divan, puffing quickly at a cigarette. He sat up, overturning a wine-glass which stood with a half-filled bottle at his elbow.

Before Kirowan could speak, I burst out with our news. "James Gordon has been shot!"

He sprang to his feet. "Shot? When? When did she kill him?"

"She?" I glared in bewilderment. "How did you know——"

With a steely hand Kirowan thrust me aside, and as the men faced each other, I saw recognition flare up in Roelocke's face. They made a strong contrast: Kirowan, tall, pale with some white-hot passion; Roelocke, slim, darkly handsome, with the saracenic arch of his slim brows above his black eyes. I realized that whatever else occurred, it lay between those two men. They were not strangers; I could sense like a tangible thing the hate that lay between them.

"John Kirowan!" softly whispered Roelocke.

"You remember me, Yosef Vrolok!" Only an iron control kept Kirowan's voice steady. The other merely stared at him without speaking.

"Years ago," said Kirowan more deliberately, "when we delved in the dark mysteries together in Budapest, I saw whither you were drifting. I drew back; I would not descend to the foul depths of forbidden occultism and diabolism to which you sank. And because I would not, you despised me, and you robbed me of the only woman I ever loved; you turned her against me by means of your vile arts, and then you degraded and debauched her, sank her into your own foul slime. I had killed you with my hands then, Yosef Vrolok—vampire by nature as well as by name that you are—but your arts protected you from physical vengeance. But you have trapped yourself at last!"

Kirowan's voice rose in fierce exultation. All his cultured restraint had been swept away from him, leaving a primitive, elemental man, raging and gloating over a hated foe.

"You sought the destruction of James Gordon and his wife, because she unwittingly escaped your snare; you——"

Roelocke shrugged his shoulders and laughed. "You are mad. I have not seen the Gordons for weeks. Why blame me for their family troubles?"

Kirowan snarled. "Liar as always. What did you say just now when O'Donnel told you Gordon had been shot? 'When did *she* kill him?' You were expecting to hear that the girl had killed her husband. Your psychic powers had told you that a climax was close at hand.

You were nervously awaiting news of the success of your devilish scheme.

"But I did not need a slip of your tongue to recognize your handiwork. I knew as soon as I saw the ring on Evelyn Gordon's finger; the ring she could not remove; the ancient and accursed ring of Thoth-amon, handed down by foul cults of sorcerers since the days of forgotten Stygia. I knew that ring was yours, and I knew by what ghastly rites you came to possess it. And I knew its power. Once she put it on her finger, in her innocence and ignorance, she was in your power. By your black magic you summoned the black elemental spirit, *the haunter of the ring*, out of the gulfs of Night and the ages. Here in your accursed chamber you performed unspeakable rituals to drive Evelyn Gordon's soul from her body, and to cause that body to be possessed by that godless sprite from *outside* the human universe.

"She was too clean and wholesome, her love for her husband too strong, for the fiend to gain complete and permanent possession of her body; only for brief instants could it drive her own spirit into the void and animate her form. But that was enough for your purpose. But you have brought ruin upon yourself by your vengeance!"

Kirowan's voice rose to a feline screech.

"What was the price demanded by the fiend you drew from the Pits? Ha, you blench! Yosef Vrolok is not the only man to have learned forbidden secrets! After I left Hungary, a broken man, I took up again the study of the black arts, to trap you, you cringing serpent! I explored the ruins of Zimbabwe, the lost mountains of inner Mongolia, and the forgotten jungle islands of the southern seas. I learned what sickened my soul so that I forswore occultism for ever—but I learned of the black spirit that deals death by the hand of a beloved one, and is controlled by a master of magic.

"But, Yosef Vrolok, you are not an adept! You have not the power to control the fiend you have invoked. And you have sold your soul!"

The Hungarian tore at his collar as if it were a strangling noose. His face had changed, as if a mask had dropped away; he looked much older.

"You lie!" he panted. "I did not promise him *my* soul——"

"I do not lie!" Kirowan's shriek was shocking in its wild exultation. "I know the price a man must pay for calling forth the nameless shape that roams the gulfs of Darkness. Look! There in the corner behind you! A nameless, sightless thing is laughing—is mocking you! It has fulfilled its bargain, and it has come for you, Yosef Vrolok!"

"No!" shrieked Vrolok, tearing his limp collar away from his sweating throat. His composure had crumpled, and his demoralization was sickening to see. "I tell you it was not *my* soul—I promised it a soul, but not *my* soul—he must take the soul of the girl, or of James Gordon——"

"Fool!" roared Kirowan. "Do you think *he* could take the souls of innocence? That he would not know they were beyond his reach? The girl and the youth he could kill; their souls were not his to take or yours to give. But *your* black soul is not beyond his reach, and he will have his wage. *Look!* He is materializing behind you! He is growing out of thin air!"

Was it the hypnosis inspired by Kirowan's burning words that caused me to shudder and grow cold, to feel an icy chill that was not of earth pervade the room? Was it a trick of light and shadow that seemed to produce the effect of

a black anthropomorphic shadow on the wall behind the Hungarian? *No,* by heaven! It grew, it swelled—Vrolok had not turned. He stared at Kirowan with eyes starting from his head, hair standing stiffly on his scalp, sweat dripping from his livid face.

Kirowan's cry started shudders down my spine.

"Look behind you, fool! *I see him!* He has come! He is here! His grisly mouth gapes in awful laughter! His misshapen paws reach for you!"

And then at last Vrolok wheeled, with an awful shriek, throwing his arms above his head in a gesture of wild despair. And for one brain-shattering instant he was *blotted out* by a great black shadow —Kirowan grasped my arm and we fled from that accursed chamber, blind with horror.

* * * * *

THE same paper which bore a brief item telling of James Gordon having suffered a slight scalp-wound by the accidental discharge of a pistol in his home, headlined the sudden death of Joseph Roelocke, wealthy and eccentric clubman, in his sumptuous apartments—apparently from heart-failure.

I read it at breakfast, while I drank cup after cup of black coffee, from a hand that was not too steady, even after the lapse of a night. Across the table from me Kirowan likewise seemed to lack appetite. He brooded, as if he roamed again through bygone years.

"Gordon's fantastic theory of reincarnation was wild enough," I said at last. "But the actual facts were still more incredible. Tell me, Kirowan, was that last scene the result of hypnosis? Was it the power of your words that made me seem to see a black horror grow out of the air and rip Yosef Vrolok's soul from his living body?"

He shook his head. "No human hypnotism would strike that black-hearted devil dead on the floor. No; there are beings outside the ken of common humanity, foul shapes of transcosmic evil. Such a one it was with which Vrolok dealt."

"But how could it claim his soul?" I persisted. "If indeed such an awful bargain had been struck, it had not fulfilled its part, for James Gordon was not dead, but merely knocked senseless."

"Vrolok did not know it," answered Kirowan. "He thought that Gordon was dead, and I convinced him that he himself had been trapped, and was doomed. In his demoralization he fell easy prey to the thing he had called forth. *It,* of course, was always watching for a moment of weakness on his part. The powers of Darkness never deal fairly with human beings; he who traffics with them is always cheated in the end."

"It's a mad nightmare," I muttered. "But it seems to me, then, that you as much as anything else brought about Vrolok's death."

"It is gratifying to think so," Kirowan answered. "Evelyn Gordon is safe now; and it *is* a small repayment for what he did to another girl, years ago, and in a far country."

The Colossus of Ylourgne

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

A shuddery tale of animated corpses, and a gigantic, homicidal robot that roared in wrath as it bore down upon the cathedral city of Vyones

1. The Flight of the Necromancer

THE thrice-infamous Nathaire, alchemist, astrologer and necromancer, with his ten devil-given pupils, had departed very suddenly and under circumstances of strict secrecy from the town of Vyones. It was widely thought, among the people of that vicinage, that his departure had been prompted by a salutary fear of ecclesiastical thumbscrews and fagots. Other wizards, less notorious than he, had already gone to the stake during a year of unusual inquisitory zeal; and it was well-known that Nathaire had incurred the reprobation of the Church. Few, therefore, considered the reason of his going a mystery; but the means of transit which he had employed, as well as the destination of the sorcerer and his pupils, were regarded as more than problematic.

A thousand dark and superstitious rumors were abroad; and passers made the sign of the Cross when they neared the tall, gloomy house which Nathaire had built in blasphemous proximity to the great cathedral and had filled with a furniture of Satanic luxury and strangeness. Two daring thieves, who had entered the mansion when the fact of its desertion became well established, reported that much of this furniture, as well as the books and other paraphernalia of Nathaire, had seemingly departed with its owner, doubtless to the same fiery bourn. This served to augment the unholy mystery: for it was patently impossible that Nathaire and his ten apprentices, with several cart-loads of household belongings, could have passed the ever-guarded city gates in any legitimate manner without the knowledge of the custodians.

It was said by the more devout and religious moiety that the Archfiend, with a legion of bat-winged assistants, had borne them away bodily at moonless midnight. There were clerics, and also reputable burghers, who professed to have seen the flight of dark, man-like shapes upon the blotted stars together with others that were not men, and to have heard the wailing cries of the hell-bound crew as they passed in an evil cloud over the roofs and city walls.

Others believed that the sorcerers had transported themselves from Vyones through their own diabolic arts, and had withdrawn to some unfrequented fastness where Nathaire, who had long been in feeble health, could hope to die in such peace and serenity as might be enjoyed by one who stood between the flames of the *auto-da-fe* and those of Abaddon. It was thought that he had lately cast his own horoscope, for the first time in his fifty-odd years, and had read therein an impending conjunction of disastrous planets, signifying early death.

Others still, among whom were certain rival astrologers and enchanters, said that Nathaire had retired from the public view merely that he might commune without

"The demons entered the nostrils of Le Loupgarou and Brother Theophile."

interruption with various coadjutive demons; and thus might weave, unmolested, the black spells of a supreme and lycanthropic malice. These spells, they hinted, would in due time be visited upon Vyones and perhaps upon the entire region of Averoigne; and would no doubt take the form of a fearsome pestilence, or a wholesale invultuation, or a realm-wide incursion of succubi and incubi.

Amid the seething of strange rumors, many half-forgotten tales were recalled, and new legends were created overnight. Much was made of the obscure nativity of Nathaire and his dubitable wanderings before he had settled, six years previous, in Vyones. People said that he was fiend-begotten, like the fabled Merlin: his father being no less a personage than Alastor, demon of revenge; and his mother a deformed and dwarfish sorceress. From the former, he had taken his spitefulness and malignity; from the latter, his squat, puny physique.

He had travelled in Orient lands, and had learned from Egyptian or Saracenic masters the unhallowed art of necromancy, in whose practise he was unrivalled. There were black whispers anent the use he had made of long-dead bodies, of fleshless bones, and the service he had wrung from buried men that the angel of doom alone could lawfully raise up. He had never been popular, though many had sought his advice and assistance in the furthering of their own more or less dubious affairs. Once, in the third year after his coming to Vyones, he had been stoned in public because of his bruited necromancies, and had been permanently

lamed by a well-directed cobble. This injury, it was thought, he had never forgiven; and he was said to return the antagonism of the clergy with the hellish hatred of an Antichrist.

Apart from the sorcerous evils and abuses of which he was commonly suspected, he had long been looked upon as a corrupter of youth. Despite his minikin stature, his deformity and ugliness, he possessed a remarkable power, a mesmeric persuasion; and his pupils, whom he was said to have plunged into bottomless and ghoulish iniquities, were young men of the most brilliant promise. On the whole, his vanishment was regarded as a quite providential riddance.

AMONG the people of the city there was one man who took no part in the somber gossip and lurid speculation. This man was Gaspard du Nord, himself a student of the proscribed sciences, who had been numbered for a year among the pupils of Nathaire but had chosen to withdraw quietly from the master's household after learning the enormities that would attend his further initiation. He had, however, taken with him much rare and peculiar knowledge, together with a certain insight into the baleful powers and night-dark motives of the necromancer.

Because of this knowledge and insight, Gaspard preferred to remain silent when he heard of Nathaire's departure. Also, he did not think it well to revive the memory of his own past pupilage. Alone with his books, in a sparsely furnished attic, he frowned above a small, oblong mirror, framed with an arabesque of golden vipers, that had once been the property of Nathaire.

It was not the reflection of his own comely and youthful though subtly lined face that caused him to frown. Indeed, the mirror was of another kind than that which reflects the features of the gazer. In its depths, for a few instants, he had beheld a strange and ominous-looking scene, whose participants were known to him but whose location he could not recognize or orientate. Before he could study it closely, the mirror had clouded as if with the rising of alchemic fumes, and he had seen no more.

This clouding, he reflected, could mean only one thing: Nathaire had known himself watched and had put forth a counter-spell that rendered the clairvoyant mirror useless. It was the realization of this fact, together with the brief, sinister glimpse of Nathaire's present activities, that troubled Gaspard and caused a chill horror to mount slowly in his mind: a horror that had not yet found a palpable form or a name.

2. The Gathering of the Dead

THE departure of Nathaire and his pupils occurred in the late spring of 1281, during the interlunar dark. Afterward a new moon waxed above the flowery fields and bright-leafed woods, and waned in ghostly silver. With its waning, people began to talk of other magicians and fresher mysteries.

Then, in the moon-deserted nights of early summer, there came a series of disappearances far more unnatural and inexplicable than that of the dwarfish, malignant sorcerer.

It was found one day, by grave-diggers who had gone early to their toil in a cemetery outside the walls of Vyones, that no less than six newly occupied graves had been opened, and the bodies, which were those of reputable citizens, removed. On closer examination, it became all too evident that this removal had not been effected by robbers. The coffins, which lay aslant or stood protruding upright

from the mold, offered all the appearance of having been shattered from within as if by the use of extrahuman strength; and the fresh earth itself was upheaved, as if the dead men, in some awful, untimely resurrection, had actually *dug* their way to the surface.

The corpses had vanished utterly, as if hell had swallowed them; and, as far as could be learned, there were no eye-witnesses of their fate. In those devil-ridden times, only one explanation of the happening seemed credible: demons had entered the graves and had taken bodily possession of the dead, compelling them to arise and go forth.

To the dismay and horror of all Averoigne, the strange vanishment was followed with appalling promptness by many others of a like sort. It seemed as if an occult, resistless summons had been laid upon the dead. Nightly, for a period of two weeks, the cemeteries of Vyones and also those of other towns, of villages and hamlets, gave up a ghastly quota of their tenants. From brazen-bolted tombs, from common charnels, from shallow, unconsecrated trenches, from the marble-lidded vaults of churches and cathedrals, the weird exodus went on without cessation.

Worse than this, if possible, there were newly ceremented corpses that leapt from their biers or catafalques, and disregarding the horrified watchers, ran with great bounds of automatic frenzy into the night, never to be seen again by those who lamented them.

In every case, the missing bodies were those of young stalwart men who had died but recently and had met their death through violence or accident rather than wasting illness. Some were criminals who had paid the penalty of their misdeeds; others were men-at-arms or constables, slain in the execution of their duty. Knights who had died in tourney or personal combat were numbered among them; and many were the victims of the robber bands who infested Averoigne at that time. There were monks, merchants, nobles, yeomen, pages, priests; but none, in any case, who had passed the prime of life. The old and infirm, it seemed, were safe from the animating demons.

The situation was looked upon by the more superstitious as a veritable omening of the world's end. Satan was making war with his cohorts and was carrying the bodies of the holy dead into hellish captivity. The consternation increased a hundredfold when it became plain that even the most liberal sprinkling of holy water, the performance of the most awful and cogent exorcisms, failed utterly to give protection against this diabolic ravishment. The Church owned itself powerless to cope with the strange evil; and the forces of secular law could do nothing to arraign or punish the intangible agency.

Because of the universal fear that prevailed, no effort was made to follow the missing cadavers. Ghastly tales, however, were told by late wayfarers who had met certain of these liches, striding alone or in companies along the roads of Averoigne. They gave the appearance of being deaf, dumb, totally insensate, and of hurrying with horrible speed and sureness toward a remote, predestined goal. The general direction of their flight, it seemed, was eastward; but only with the cessation of the exodus, which had numbered several hundred people, did any one begin to suspect the actual destination of the dead.

This destination, it somehow became rumored, was the ruinous castle of Ylourgne, beyond the werewolf-haunted forest, in the outlying, semi-mountainous hills of Averoigne.

Ylourgne, a great, craggy pile that had been built by a line of evil and marauding barons now extinct, was a place that even the goatherds preferred to shun. The wrathful specters of its bloody lords were said to move turbulently in its crumbling halls; and its chatelaines were the Undead. No one cared to dwell in the shadow of its cliff-founded walls; and the nearest abode of living men was a small Cistercian monastery, more than a mile away on the opposite slope of the valley.

The monks of this austere brotherhood held little commerce with the world beyond the hills; and few were the visitors who sought admission at their high-perched portals. But, during that dreadful summer, following the disappearances of the dead, a weird and disquieting tale went forth from the monastery throughout Averoigne.

Beginning with late spring, the Cistercian monks were compelled to take cognizance of sundry odd phenomena in the old, long-deserted ruins of Ylourgne, which were visible from their windows. They had beheld flaring lights, where lights should not have been: flames of uncanny blue and crimson that shuddered behind the broken, weed-grown embrasures or rose starward above the jagged crenelations. Hideous noises had issued from the ruin by night together with the flames; and the monks had heard a clangor as of hellish anvils and hammers, a ringing of gigantic armor and maces, and had deemed that Ylourgne was become a mustering-ground of devils. Mephitic odors as of brimstone and burning flesh had floated across the valley; and even by day, when the noises were silent and the lights no longer flared, a thin haze of hell-blue vapor hung upon the battlements.

It was plain, the monks thought, that the place had been occupied from beneath by subterrestrial beings; for no one was seen to approach it by way of the bare, open slopes and crags. Observing these signs of the Archfoe's activity in their neighborhood, they crossed themselves with new fervor and frequency, and said their *Patefs* and *Aves* more interminably than before. Their toils and austerities, also, they redoubled. Otherwise, since the old castle was a place abandoned by men, they took no heed of the supposed occupation, deeming it well to mind their own affairs unless in case of overt Satanic hostility.

THEY kept a careful watch; but for several weeks they saw no one who actually entered Ylourgne or emerged therefrom. Except for the nocturnal lights and noises, and the hovering vapor by day, there was no proof of tenantry either human or diabolic.

Then, one morning, in the valley below the terraced gardens of the monastery, two brothers, hoeing weeds in a carrot-patch, beheld the passing of a singular train of people who came from the direction of the great forest of Averoigne and went upward, climbing the steep, chasmy slope toward Ylourgne.

These people, the monks averred, were striding along in great haste, with stiff but flying steps; and all were strangely pale of feature and were habited in the garments of the grave. The shrouds of some were torn and ragged; and all were dusty with travel or grimed with the mold of interment. The people numbered a dozen or more; and after them, at intervals, there came several stragglers, attired like the rest. With marvelous agility and speed, they mounted the hill and disappeared at length amid the lowering walls of Ylourgne.

At this time, no rumor of the ravished

graves and biers had reached the Cistercians. The tale was brought to them later, after they had beheld, on many successive mornings, the passing of small or great companies of the dead toward the devil-taken castle. Hundreds of these liches, they swore, had filed by beneath the monastery; and doubtless many others had gone past unnoted in the dark. None, however, were seen to come forth from Ylourgne, which had swallowed them up like the undisgorging Pit.

Though direly frightened and sorely scandalized, the brothers still thought it well to refrain from action. Some, the hardiest, irked by all these flagrant signs of evil, had desired to visit the ruins with holy water and lifted crucifixes. But their abbot, in his wisdom, enjoined them to wait. In the meanwhile, the nocturnal flames grew brighter, the noises louder.

Also, in the course of this waiting, while incessant prayers went up from the little monastery, a frightful thing occurred. One of the brothers, a stout fellow named Theophile, in violation of the rigorous discipline, had made over-frequent visits to the wine-casks. No doubt he had tried to drown his pious horror at these untoward happenings. At any rate, after his potations, he had the ill-luck to wander out among the precipices and break his neck.

Sorrowing for his death and dereliction, the brothers laid Theophile in the chapel and chanted their masses for his soul. These masses, in the dark hours before morning, were interrupted by the untimely resurrection of the dead monk, who, with his head lolling horribly on his broken neck, rushed as if fiend-ridden from the chapel and ran down the hill toward the demon flames and clamors of Ylourgne.

3. The Testimony of the Monks

FOLLOWING the above-related occurrence, two of the brothers who had previously desired to visit the haunted castle again applied to the abbot for this permission, saying that God would surely aid them in avenging the abduction of Theophile's body as well as the taking of many others from consecrated ground. Marvelling at the hardihood of these lusty monks, who proposed to beard the Archenemy in his lair, the abbot permitted them to go forth, furnished with aspergilluses and flasks of holy water, and bearing great crosses of hornbeam, such as would have served for maces with which to brain an armored knight.

The monks, whose names were Bernard and Stéphane, went boldly up at middle forenoon to assail the evil stronghold. It was an arduous climb, among overhanging boulders and along slippery scarps; but both were stout and agile, and, moreover, well accustomed to such climbing. Since the day was sultry and airless, their white robes were soon stained with sweat; but pausing only for brief prayer, they pressed on; and in good season they neared the castle, upon whose gray, time-eroded ramparts they could still descry no evidence of occupation or activity.

The deep moat that had once surrounded the place was now dry, and had been partly filled by crumbling earth and detritus from the walls. The drawbridge had rotted away; but the blocks of the barbican, collapsing into the moat, had made a sort of rough causey on which it was possible to cross. Not without trepidation, and lifting their crucifixes as warriors lift their weapons in the escalade of an armed fortress, the brothers climbed over the ruin of the barbican into the courtyard.

This too, like the battlements, was seemingly deserted. Overgrown nettles,

rank grasses and sapling trees were rooted between its paving-stones. The high, massive donjon, the chapel, and that portion of the castellated structure containing the great hall, had preserved their main outlines after centuries of dilapidation. To the left of the broad bailey, a doorway yawned like the mouth of a dark cavern in the cliffy mass of the hall-building; and from this doorway there issued a thin, bluish vapor, writhing in phantom coils toward the unclouded heavens.

Approaching the doorway, the brothers beheld a gleaming of red fires within, like the eyes of dragons blinking through infernal murk. They felt sure that the place was an outpost of Erebus, an antechamber of the Pit; but nevertheless, they entered bravely, chanting loud exorcisms and brandishing their mighty crosses of hornbeam.

Passing through the cavernous doorway, they could see but indistinctly in the gloom, being somewhat blinded by the summer sunlight they had left. Then, with the gradual clearing of their vision, a monstrous scene was limned before them, with ever-growing details of crowding horror and grotesquery. Some of these details were obscure and mysteriously terrifying; others, all too plain, were branded as if with sudden, ineffaceable hell-fire on the minds of the monks.

They stood on the threshold of a colossal chamber, which seemed to have been made by the tearing down of upper floors and inner partitions adjacent to the castle hall, itself a room of huge extent. The chamber seemed to recede through interminable shadow, shafted with sunlight falling through the rents of ruin: sunlight that was powerless to dissipate the infernal gloom and mystery.

The monks averred later that they saw many people moving about the place, together with sundry demons, some of whom were shadowy and gigantic, and others barely to be distinguished from the men. These people, as well as their familiars, were occupied with the tending of reverberatory furnaces and immense pear-shaped and gourd-shaped vessels such as were used in alchemy. Some, also, were stooping above great fuming cauldrons, like sorcerers busy with the brewing of terrible drugs. Against the opposite wall, there were two enormous vats, built of stone and mortar, whose circular sides rose higher than a man's head, so that Bernard and Stéphane were unable to determine their contents. One of the vats gave forth a whitish glimmering; the other, a ruddy luminosity.

Near the vats, and somewhat between them, there stood a sort of low couch or litter, made of luxurious, weirdly figured fabrics such as the Saracens weave. On this the monks discerned a dwarfish being, pale and wizened, with eyes of chill flame that shone like evil beryls through the dusk. The dwarf, who had all the air of a feeble moribund, was supervising the toils of the men and their familiars.

The dazed eyes of the brothers began to comprehend other details. They saw that several corpses, among which they recognized that of Theophile, were lying on the middle floor, together with a heap of human bones that had been wrenched asunder at the joints, and great lumps of flesh piled like the carvings of butchers. One of the men was lifting the bones and dropping them into a cauldron beneath which there glowed a ruby-colored fire; and another was flinging the lumps of flesh into a tub filled with some hueless liquid that gave forth an evil hissing as of a thousand serpents.

Others had stripped the grave-clothes from one of the cadavers, and were starting to assail it with long knives. Others

still were mounting rude flights of stone stairs along the walls of the immense vats, carrying vessels filled with semi-liquescent matters which they emptied over the high rims.

Appalled at this vision of human and Satanic turpitude, and feeling a more than righteous indignation, the monks resumed their chanting of sonorous exorcisms and rushed forward. Their entrance, it appeared, was not perceived by the heinously occupied crew of sorcerers and devils.

Bernard and Stéphane, filled with an ardor of godly wrath, were about to fling themselves upon the butchers who had started to assail the dead body. This corpse they recognized as being that of a notorious outlaw, named Jacques Le Loupgarou, who had been slain a few days previous in combat with the officers of the state. Le Loupgarou, noted for his brawn, his cunning and his ferocity, had long terrorized the woods and highways of Averoigne. His great body had been half eviscerated by the swords of the constabulary; and his beard was stiff and purple with the dried blood of a ghastly wound that had cloven his face from temple to mouth. He had died unshriven, but nevertheless, the monks were unwilling to see his helpless cadaver put to some unhallowed use beyond the surmise of Christians.

The pale, malignant-looking dwarf had now perceived the brothers. They heard him cry out in a shrill, imperatory tone that rose above the ominous hiss of the cauldrons and the hoarse mutter of men and demons.

They knew not his words, which were those of some outlandish tongue and sounded like an incantation. Instantly, as if in response to an order, two of the men turned from their unholy chemistry, and lifting copper basins filled with an unknown, fetid liquor, hurled the contents of these vessels in the faces of Bernard and Stéphane.

The brothers were blinded by the stinging fluid, which bit their flesh as with many serpents' teeth; and they were overcome by the noxious fumes, so that their great crosses dropped from their hands and they both fell unconscious on the castle floor.

Recovering anon their sight and their other senses, they found that their hands had been tied with heavy thongs of gut, so that they were now helpless and could no longer wield their crucifixes or the sprinklers of holy water which they carried.

In this ignominious condition, they heard the voice of the evil dwarf, commanding them to arise. They obeyed, though clumsily and with difficulty, being denied the assistance of their hands. Bernard, who was still sick with the poisonous vapor he had inhaled, fell twice before he succeeded in standing erect; and his discomfiture was greeted with a cachinnation of foul, obscene laughter from the assembled sorcerers.

Now, standing, the monks were taunted by the dwarf, who mocked and reviled them, with appalling blasphemies such as could be uttered only by a bond-servant of Satan. At last, according to their sworn testimony, he said to them:

"Return to your kennel, ye whelps of Ialdabaoth, and take with you this message: *They that came here as many shall go forth as one.*"

Then, in obedience to a dreadful formula spoken by the dwarf, two of the familiars, who had the shape of enormous and shadowy beasts, approached the body of Le Loupgarou and that of Brother Theophile. One of the foul demons, like a vapor that sinks into a marsh, entered

the bloody nostrils of Le Loupgarou, disappearing inch by inch, till its horned and bestial head was withdrawn from sight. The other, in like manner, went in through the nostrils of Brother Theophile, whose head lay wried athwart his shoulder on the broken neck.

Then, when the demons had completed their possession, the bodies, in a fashion horrible to behold, were raised up from the castle floor, the one with ravelled entrails hanging from its wide wounds, the other with a head that drooped forward loosely on its bosom. Then, animated by their devils, the cadavers took up the crosses of hornbeam that had been dropped by Stéphane and Bernard; and using the crosses for bludgeons, they drove the monks in ignominious flight from the castle, amid a loud, tempestuous howling of infernal laughter from the dwarf and his necromantic crew. And the nude corpse of Le Loupgarou and the robed cadaver of Theophile followed them far on the chasm-riven slopes below Ylourgne, striking great blows with the crosses, so that the backs of the two Cistercians were become a mass of bloody bruises.

After a defeat so signal and crushing, no more of the monks were emboldened to go up against Ylourgne. The whole monastery, thereafter, devoted itself to triple austerities, to quadrupled prayers; and awaiting the unknown will of God, and the equally obscure machinations of the Devil, maintained a pious faith that was somewhat tempered with trepidation.

In time, through goatherds who visited the monks, the tale of Stéphane and Bernard went forth throughout Averoigne, adding to the grievous alarm that had been caused by the wholesale disappearance of the dead. No one knew what was really going on in the haunted castle or what disposition had been made of the hundreds of migratory corpses; for the light thrown on their fate by the monks' story, though lurid and frightful, was all too inconclusive; and the message sent by the dwarf was somewhat cabalistic.

Everyone felt, however, that some gigantic menace, some black, infernal enchantment, was being brewed within the ruinous walls. The malign, moribund dwarf was all too readily identified with the missing sorcerer, Nathaire; and his underlings, it was plain, were Nathaire's pupils.

4. The Going-forth of Gaspard du Nord

ALONE in his attic chamber, Gaspard du Nord, student of alchemy and sorcery and quondam pupil of Nathaire, sought repeatedly, but always in vain, to consult the viper-circled mirror. The glass remained obscure and cloudy, as with the risen fumes of Satanical alembics or baleful necromantic braziers. Haggard and weary with long nights of watching, Gaspard knew that Nathaire was even more vigilant than he.

Reading with anxious care the general configuration of the stars, he found the foretokening of a great evil that was to come upon Averoigne. But the nature of the evil was not clearly shown.

In the meanwhile the hideous resurrection and migration of the dead was taking place. All Averoigne shuddered at the manifold enormity. Like the timeless night of a Memphian plague, terror settled everywhere; and people spoke of each new atrocity in bated whispers, without daring to voice the execrable tale aloud. To Gaspard, as to everyone, the whispers came; and likewise, after the horror had apparently ceased in early midsummer, there came the appalling story of the Cistercian monks.

Now, at last, the long-baffled watcher found an inkling of that which he sought.

The hiding-place of the fugitive necromancer and his apprentices, at least, had been uncovered; and the disappearing dead were clearly traced to their bourn. But still, even for the percipient Gaspard, there remained an undeclared enigma: the exact nature of the abominable brew, the hell-dark sorcery, that Nathaire was concocting in his remote den. Gaspard felt sure of one thing only: the dying, splenetic dwarf, knowing that his allotted time was short, and hating the people of Averoigne with a bottomless rancor, would prepare an enormous and maleficent magic without parallel.

Even with his knowledge of Nathaire's proclivities, and his awareness of the well-nigh inexhaustible arcanic science, the reserves of pit-deep wizardry possessed by the dwarf, he could form only vague, terrifical conjectures anent the incubated evil. But, as time went on, he felt an ever-deepening oppression, the adumbration of a monstrous menace crawling from the dark rim of the world. He could not shake off his disquietude; and finally he resolved, despite the obvious perils of such an excursion, to pay a secret visit to the neighborhood of Ylourgne.

Gaspard, though he came of a well-to-do family, was at that time in straitened circumstances; for his devotion to a somewhat doubtful science had been disapproved by his father. His sole income was a small pittance, purveyed secretly to the youth by his mother and sister. This sufficed for his meager food, the rent of his room, and a few books and instruments and chemicals; but it would not permit the purchase of a horse or even a humble mule for the proposed journey of more than forty miles.

Undaunted, he set forth on foot, carrying only a dagger and a wallet of food. He timed his wanderings so that he would reach Ylourgne at nightfall in the rising of a full moon. Much of his journey lay through the great, lowering forest, which approached the very walls of Vyones on the eastern side and ran in a somber arc through Averoigne to the mouth of the rocky valley below Ylourgne. After a few miles, he emerged from the mighty wood of pines and oaks and larches; and thenceforward, for the first day, followed the river Isoile through an open, well-peopled plain. He spent the warm summer night beneath a beech-tree, in the vicinity of a small village, not caring to sleep in the lonely woods where robbers and wolves—and creatures of a more baleful repute—were commonly supposed to dwell.

At evening of the second day, after passing through the wildest and oldest portion of the immemorial wood, he came to the steep, stony valley that led to his destination. This valley was the fountain-head of the Isoile, which had dwindled to a mere rivulet. In the brown twilight, between sunset and moonrise, he saw the lights of the Cistercian monastery; and opposite, on the piled, forbidding scarps, the grim and rugged mass of the ruinous stronghold of Ylourgne, with wan and wizard fires flickering behind its high embrasures. Apart from these fires, there was no sign of occupation; and he did not hear at any time the dismal noises reported by the monks.

Gaspard waited till the round moon, yellow as the eye of some immense nocturnal bird, had begun to peer above the darkling valley. Then, very cautiously, since the neighborhood was strange to him, he started to make his way toward the somber, brooding castle.

Even for one well-used to such climbing, the escalade would have offered enough difficulty and danger by moonlight. Several times, finding himself at the bottom of a sheer cliff, he was com-

pelled to retrace his hard-won progress; and often he was saved from falling only by stunted shrubs and briars that had taken root in the niggard soil. Breathless, with torn raiment, and scored and bleeding hands, he gained at length the shoulder of the craggy height, below the walls.

Here he paused to recover breath and recuperate his flagging strength. He could see from his vantage the pale reflection as of hidden flames, that beat upward on the inner wall of the high-built donjon. He heard a low hum of confused noises, whose distance and direction were alike baffling. Sometimes they seemed to float downward from the black battlements, sometimes to issue from subterranean depths far in the hill.

Apart from this remote, ambiguous hum, the night was locked in a mortal stillness. The very winds appeared to shun the vicinity of the dread castle. An unseen, clammy cloud of paralyzing evil hung removeless upon all things; and the pale, swollen moon, the patroness of witches and sorcerers, distilled her green poison above the crumbling towers in a silence older than time.

Gaspard felt the obscenely clinging weight of a more burdenous thing than his own fatigue when he resumed his progress toward the barbican. Invisible webs of the waiting, ever-gathering evil seemed to impede him. The slow, noisome flapping of intangible wings was heavy in his face. He seemed to breathe a surging wind from unfathomable vaults and caverns of corruption. Inaudible howlings, derisive or minatory, thronged in his ears, and foul hands appeared to thrust him back. But, bowing his head as if against a blowing gale, he went on and climbed the mounded ruin of the barbican, into the weedy courtyard.

THE place was deserted, to all seeming; and much of it was still deep in the shadows of the walls and turrets. Near by, in the black, silver-crenelated pile, Gaspard saw the open, cavernous doorway described by the monks. It was lit from within by a lurid glare, wannish and eery as marsh-fires. The humming noise, now audible as a muttering of voices, issued from the doorway; and Gaspard thought that he could see dark, sooty figures moving rapidly in the lit interior.

Keeping in the farther shadows, he stole along the courtyard, making a sort of circuit amid the ruins. He did not dare to approach the open entrance for fear of being seen; though, as far as he could tell, the place was unguarded.

He came to the donjon, on whose upper wall the wan light flickered obliquely through a sort of rift in the long building adjacent. This opening was at some distance from the ground; and Gaspard saw that it had been formerly the door to a stone balcony. A flight of broken steps led upward along the wall to the half-crumbled remnant of this balcony; and it occurred to the youth that he might climb the steps and peer unobserved into the interior of Ylourgne.

Some of the stairs were missing; and all were in heavy shadow. Gaspard found his way precariously to the balcony, pausing once in considerable alarm when a fragment of the worn stone, loosened by his footfall, dropped with a loud clattering on the courtyard flags below. Apparently it was unheard by the occupants of the castle; and after a little he resumed his climbing.

Cautiously he neared the large, ragged opening through which the light poured upward. Crouching on a narrow ledge, which was all that remained of the balcony, he peered in on a most astounding

and terrific spectacle, whose details were so bewildering that he could barely comprehend their import till after many minutes.

It was plain that the story told by the monks—allowing for their religious bias—had been far from extravagant. Almost the whole interior of the half-ruined pile had been torn down and dismantled to afford room for the activities of Nathaire. This demolition in itself was a superhuman task for whose execution the sorcerer must have employed a legion of familiars as well as his ten pupils.

The vast chamber was fitfully illumed by the glare of athanors and braziers; and, above all, by the weird glimmering from the huge stone vats. Even from his high vantage, the watcher could not see the contents of these vats; but a white luminosity poured upward from the rim of one of them, and a flesh-tinted phosphorescence from the other.

Gaspard had seen certain of the experiments and evocations of Nathaire, and was all too familiar with the appurtenances of the dark arts. Within certain limits, he was not squeamish; nor was it likely that he would have been terrified overmuch by the shadowy, uncouth shapes of demons who toiled in the pit below him side by side with the black-clad pupils of the sorcerer. But a cold horror clutched his heart when he saw the incredible, enormous thing that occupied the central floor: the colossal human skeleton a hundred feet in length, stretching for more than the extent of the old castle hall; the skeleton whose bony right foot the group of men and devils, to all appearance, were busily clothing with human flesh!

The prodigious and macabre framework, complete in every part, with ribs like the arches of some Satanic nave, shone as if it were still heated by the fires of an infernal welding. It seemed to shimmer and burn with unnatural life, to quiver with malign disquietude in the flickering glare and gloom. The great finger-bones, curving claw-like on the floor, appeared as if they were about to close upon some helpless prey. The tremendous teeth were set in an everlasting grin of sardonic cruelty and malice. The hollow eye-sockets, deep as Tartarean wells, appeared to seethe with myriad, mocking lights, like the eyes of elementals swimming upward in obscene shadow.

Gaspard was stunned by the shocking and stupendous fantasmagoria that yawned before him like a peopled hell. Afterward he was never wholly sure of certain things, and could remember very little of the actual manner in which the work of the men and their assistants was being carried on. Dim, dubious, bat-like creatures seemed to be flitting to and fro between one of the stone vats and the group that toiled like sculptors, clothing the bony foot with a reddish plasm which they applied and molded like so much clay. Gaspard thought, but was not certain later, that this plasm, which gleamed as if with mingled blood and fire, was being brought from the rosy-litten vat in vessels borne by the claws of the shadowy flying creatures. None of them, however, approached the other vat, whose wannish light was momently enfeebled, as if it were dying down.

He looked for the minikin figure of Nathaire, whom he could not distinguish in the crowded scene. The sick necromancer—if he had not already succumbed to the little-known disease that had long wasted him like an inward flame—was no doubt hidden from view by the colossal skeleton and was perhaps directing the labors of the men and demons from his couch.

Spellbound on that precarious ledge,

the watcher failed to hear the furtive, catlike feet that were climbing behind him on the ruinous stairs. Too late, he heard the clink of a loose fragment close upon his heels; and turning in startlement, he toppled into sheer oblivion beneath the impact of a cudgel-like blow, and did not even know that the beginning fall of his body toward the courtyard had been arrested by his assailant's arms.

5. The Horror of Ylourgne

GASPARD, returning from his dark plunge into Lethean emptiness, found himself gazing into the eyes of Nathaire: those eyes of liquid night and ebony, in which swam the chill, malignant fires of stars that had gone down to irremeable perdition. For some time, in the confusion of his senses, he could see nothing but the eyes, which seemed to have drawn him forth like baleful magnets from his swoon. Apparently disembodied, or set in a face too vast for human cognizance, they burned before him in chaotic murk. Then, by degrees, he saw the other features of the sorcerer, and the details of a lurid scene; and became aware of his own situation.

Trying to lift his hands to his aching head, he found that they were bound tightly together at the wrists. He was half lying, half leaning against an object with hard planes and edges that irked his back. This object he discovered to be a sort of alchemic furnace, or athanor, part of a litter of disused apparatus that stood or lay on the castle floor. Cupels, aludels, cucurbits, like enormous gourds and globes, were mingled in strange confusion with the piled, iron-clasped books and the sooty cauldrons and braziers of a darker science.

Nathaire, propped among Saracenic cushions with arabesques of sullen gold and fulgurant scarlet, was peering upon him from a kind of improvised couch, made with bales of Orient rugs and arrases, to whose luxury the rude walls of the castle, stained with mold and mottled with dead fungi, offered a grotesque foil. Dim lights and evilly swooping shadows flickered across the scene; and Gaspard could hear a guttural hum of voices behind him. Twisting his head a little, he saw one of the stone vats, whose rosy luminosity was blurred and blotted by vampire wings that went to and fro.

"Welcome," said Nathaire, after an interval in which the student began to perceive the fatal progress of illness in the pain-pinched features before him. "So Gaspard du Nord has come to see his former master!" The harsh, imperatory voice, with demoniac volume, issued appallingly from the wizened frame.

"I have come," said Gaspard, in laconic echo. "Tell me, what devil's work is this in which I find you engaged? And what have you done with the dead bodies that were stolen by your accursed familiars?"

The frail, dying body of Nathaire, as if possessed by some sardonic fiend, rocked to and fro on the luxurious couch in a long, violent gust of laughter, without other reply.

"If your looks bear creditable witness," said Gaspard, when the baleful laughter had ceased, "you are mortally ill, and the time is short in which you can hope to atone for your deeds of malefice and make your peace with God—if indeed it still be possible for you to make peace. What foul and monstrous brew are you preparing, to insure the ultimate perdition of your soul?"

The dwarf was again seized by a spasm of diabolic mirth.

"Nay, nay, my good Gaspard," he said finally. "I have made another bond than the one with which puling cowards try to

purchase the good will and forgiveness of the heavenly Tyrant. Hell may take me in the end, if it will; but Hell has paid, and will still pay, an ample and goodly price. I must die soon, it is true, for my doom is written in the stars: but in death, by the grace of Satan, I shall live again, and shall go forth endowed with the mighty thews of the Anakim, to visit vengeance on the people of Averoigne, who have long hated me for my necromantic wisdom and have held me in derision for my dwarf stature."

"What madness is this whereof you dream?" asked the youth, appalled by the more than human frenzy and malignity that seemed to dilate the shrunken frame of Nathaire and stream in Tartarean luster from his eyes.

"It is no madness, but a veritable thing: a miracle, mayhap, as life itself is a miracle. . . . From the fresh bodies of the dead, which otherwise would have rotted away in charnel foulness, my pupils and familiars are making for me, beneath my instruction, the giant form whose skeleton you have beheld. My soul, at the death of its present body, will pass into this colossal tenement through the working of certain spells of transmigration in which my faithful assistants have also been carefully instructed.

"If you had remained with me, Gaspard, and had not drawn back in your petty, pious squeamishness from the marvels and profundities that I should have unveiled for you, it would now be your privilege to share in the creation of this prodigy. . . . And if you had come to Ylourgne a little sooner in your presumptuous prying, I might have made a certain use of your stout bones and muscles . . . the same use I have made of other young men, who died through accident or violence. But it is too late even for this, since the building of the bones has been completed, and it remains only to invest them with human flesh. My good Gaspard, there is nothing whatever to be done with you—except to put you safely out of the way. Providentially, for this purpose, there is an oubliette beneath the castle: a somewhat dismal lodging-place, no doubt, but one that was made strong and deep by the grim lords of Ylourgne."

Gaspard was unable to frame any reply to this sinister and extraordinary speech. Searching his horror-frozen brain for words, he felt himself seized from behind by the hands of unseen beings who had come, no doubt, in answer to some gesture of Nathaire: a gesture which the captive had not perceived. He was blindfolded with some heavy fabric, moldy and musty as a grave-cloth, and was led stumbling through the litter of strange apparatus, and down a winding flight of ruinous, narrow stairs from which the noisome breath of stagnating water, mingled with the oily muskiness of serpents, arose to meet him.

He appeared to descend for a distance that would admit of no return. Slowly the stench grew stronger, more insupportable; the stairs ended; a door clanged sullenly on rusty hinges; and Gaspard was thrust forward on a damp, uneven floor that seemed to have been worn away by myriad feet.

He heard the grating of a ponderous slab of stone. His wrists were untied, the bandage was removed from his eyes, and he saw by the light of flickering torches a round hole that yawned in the oozing floor at his feet. Beside it was the lifted slab that had formed its lid. Before he could turn to see the faces of his captors, to learn if they were men or devils, he was seized rudely and thrust into the gaping hole. He fell through Erebus-like

darkness, for what seemed an immense distance, before he struck bottom. Lying half stunned in a shallow, fetid pool, he heard the funereal thud of the heavy slab as it slid back into place far above him.

6. *The Vaults of Ylourgne*

GASPARD was revived, after a while, by the chillness of the water in which he lay. His garments were half soaked; and the slimy, mephitic pool, as he discovered by his first movement, was within an inch of his mouth. He could hear a steady, monotonous dripping, somewhere in the rayless night of his dungeon. He staggered to his feet, finding that his bones were still intact, and began a cautious exploration. Foul drops fell upon his hair and lifted face as he moved; his feet slipped and splashed in the rotten water; there were angry, vehement hissings, and serpentine coils slithered coldly across his ankles.

He soon came to a rough wall of stone, and following the wall with his fingertips, he tried to determine the extent of the oubliette. The place was more or less circular, without corners, and he failed to form any just idea of its circuit. Somewhere in his wanderings, he found a shelving pile of rubble that rose above the water against the wall; and here, for the sake of comparative dryness and comfort, he ensconced himself, after dispossessing a number of outraged reptiles. These creatures, it seemed, were inoffensive, and probably belonged to some species of water-snake; but he shivered at the touch of their clammy scales.

Sitting on the rubble-heap, Gaspard reviewed in his mind the various horrors of a situation that was infinitely dismal and desperate. He had learned the incredible, soul-shaking secret of Ylourgne, the unimaginably monstrous and blasphemous project of Nathaire; but now, immured in this noisome hole as in a subterranean tomb, in depths beneath the devil-haunted pile, he could not even warn the world of imminent menace.

The wallet of food, now more than half empty, with which he had started from Vyones, was still hanging at his back; and he assured himself by investigation that his captors had not troubled to deprive him of his dagger. Gnawing a crust of stale bread in the darkness, and caressing with his hand the hilt of the precious weapon, he sought for some rift in the all-environing despair.

He had no means of measuring the black hours that went over him with the slowness of a slime-clogged river, crawling in blind silence to a subterrene sea. The ceaseless drip of water, probably from sunken hill-springs that had supplied the castle in former years, alone broke the stillness; but the sound became in time an equivocal monotone that suggested to his half-delirious mind the mirthless and perpetual chuckling of unseen imps. At last, from sheer bodily exhaustion, he fell into troubled, nightmare-ridden slumber.

He could not tell if it were night or noon in the world without when he awakened; for the same stagnant darkness, unrelieved by ray or glimmer, brimmed the oubliette. Shivering, he became aware of a steady draft that blew upon him: a dank, unwholesome air, like the breath of unsunned vaults that had wakened into cryptic life and activity during his sleep. He had not noticed the draft heretofore; and his numb brain was startled into sudden hope by the intimation which it conveyed. Obviously there was some underground rift or channel through which the air entered; and this rift might somehow prove to be a place of egress from the oubliette.

Getting to his feet, he groped uncer-

tainly forward in the direction of the draft. He stumbled over something that crackled and broke beneath his heels, and narrowly checked himself from falling on his face in the slimy, serpent-haunted pool. Before he could investigate the obstruction or resume his blind groping, he heard a harsh, grating noise above, and a wavering shaft of yellow light came down through the oubliette's opened mouth. Dazzled, he looked up, and saw the round hole ten or twelve feet overhead, through which a dark hand had reached down with a flaring torch. A small basket, containing a loaf of coarse bread and a bottle of wine, was being lowered at the end of a cord.

Gaspard took the bread and wine, and the basket was drawn up. Before the withdrawal of the torch and the re-depositing of the slab, he contrived to make a hasty survey of his dungeon.

The place was roughly circular, as he had surmised, and was perhaps fifteen feet in diameter. The thing over which he had stumbled was a human skeleton, lying half on the rubble-heap, half in the filthy water. It was brown and rotten with age, and its garments had long melted away in patches of liquid mold.

The walls were guttered and runneled by centuries of ooze, and their very stone, it seemed, was rotting slowly to decay. In the opposite side, at the bottom, he saw the opening he had suspected: a low mouth, not much bigger than a foxes' hole, into which the sluggish water flowed. His heart sank at the sight; for, even if the water were deeper than it seemed, the hole was far too strait for the passage of a man's body. In a state of hopelessness that was like a veritable suffocation, he found his way back to the rubble-pile when the light had been withdrawn.

The loaf of bread and the bottle of wine were still in his hands. Mechanically, with dull, sodden hunger, he munched and drank. Afterward he felt stronger; and the sour, common wine served to warm him and perhaps helped to inspire him with the idea which he presently conceived.

Finishing the bottle, he found his way across the dungeon to the low, burrow-like hole. The entering air-current had strengthened, and this he took for a good omen. Drawing his dagger, he started to pick with the point at the half-rotten, decomposing wall, in an effort to enlarge the opening. He was forced to kneel in noisome silt; and the writhing coils of water-snakes, hissing frightfully, crawled across his legs as he worked. Evidently the hole was their means of ingress and egress, to and from the oubliette.

THE stone crumbled readily beneath his dagger, and Gaspard forgot the horror and ghastliness of his situation in the hope of escape. He had no means of knowing the thickness of the wall, or the nature and extent of the subterranes that lay beyond; but he felt sure that there was some channel of connection with the outer air.

For hours or days, it seemed, he toiled with his dagger, digging blindly at the soft wall and removing the débris that splashed in the water beside him. After a while, prone on his belly, he crept into the hole he had enlarged; and burrowing like some laborious mole, he made his way onward inch by inch.

At last, to his prodigious relief, the dagger-point went through into empty space. He broke away with his hands the thin shell of obstructing stone that remained; then, crawling on in the darkness, he found that he could stand upright on a sort of shelving floor.

Straightening his cramped limbs, he moved on very cautiously. He was in a narrow vault or tunnel, whose sides he could touch simultaneously with his outstretched finger-tips. The floor was a downward incline; and the water deepened, rising to his knees and then to his waist. Probably the place had once been used as an underground exit from the castle; and the roof, falling in, had dammed the water.

More than a little dismayed, Gaspard began to wonder if he had exchanged the foul, skeleton-haunted oubliette for something even worse. The night around and before him was still untouched by any ray, and the air-current, though strong, was laden with a dankness and moldiness as of interminable vaults.

Touching the tunnel-sides at intervals as he plunged hesitantly into the deepening water, he found a sharp angle, giving upon free space at his right. The space proved to be the mouth of an intersecting passage, whose flooded bottom was at least level and went no deeper into the stagnant foulness. Exploring it, he stumbled over the beginning of a flight of upward steps. Mounting these through the shoaling water, he soon found himself on dry stone.

The stairs, narrow, broken, irregular, without landings, appeared to wind in some eternal spiral that was coiled lightlessly about the bowels of Ylourgne. They were close and stifling as a tomb, and plainly they were not the source of the air-current which Gaspard had started to follow. Whither they would lead he knew not; nor could he tell if they were the same stairs by which he had been conducted to his dungeon. But he climbed steadily, pausing only at long intervals to regain his breath as best he could in the dead, mephitis-burdened air.

At length, in the solid darkness, far above, he began to hear a mysterious, muffled sound: a dull but recurrent crash as of mighty blocks and masses of falling stone. The sound was unspeakably ominous and dismal, and it seemed to shake the unfathomable walls around Gaspard, and to thrill with a sinister vibration in the steps on which he trod.

He climbed now with redoubled caution and alertness, stopping ever and anon to listen. The recurrent crashing noise grew louder, more ominous, as if it were immediately above; and the listener crouched on the dark stairs for a time that might have been many minutes, without daring to go farther. At last, with disconcerting suddenness, the sound came to an end, leaving a strained and fearful stillness.

With many baleful conjectures, not knowing what fresh enormity he should find, Gaspard ventured to resume his climbing. Again, in the blank and solid stillness, he was met by a sound: the dim, reverberant chanting of voices, as in some Satanic mass or liturgy with dirge-like cadences that turned to intolerably soaring pæans of evil triumph. Long before he could recognize the words, he shivered at the strong, malefic throbbing of the measured rhythm, whose fall and rise appeared somehow to correspond to the heart-beats of some colossal demon.

The stairs turned, for the hundredth time in their tortuous spiral; and coming forth from that long midnight, Gaspard blinked in the wan glimmering that streamed toward him from above. The choral voices met him in a more sonorous burst of infernal sound, and he knew the words for those of a rare and potent incantation, used by sorcerers for a supremely foul, supremely maleficent purpose. Affrightedly, as he climbed the last steps, he knew the thing that was taking place amid the ruins of Ylourgne.

Lifting his head warily above the castle floor, he saw that the stairs ended in a far corner of the vast room in which he had beheld Nathaire's unthinkable creation. The whole extent of the internally dismantled building lay before him, filled with a weird glare in which the beams of the slightly gibbous moon were mingled with the ruddy flames of dying athanors and the coiling, multi-colored tongues that rose from necromantic braziers.

Gaspard, for an instant, was puzzled by the flood of full moonlight amid the ruins. Then he saw that almost the whole inner wall of the castle, giving on the courtyard, had been removed. It was the tearing-down of the prodigious blocks, no doubt through an extrahuman labor levied by sorcery, that he had heard during his ascent from the subterrene vaults. His blood curdled, he felt an actual horripilation, as he realized the purpose for which the wall had been demolished.

It was evident that a whole day and part of another night had gone by since his immurement; for the moon rode high in the pale sapphire welkin. Bathed in its chilly glare, the huge vats no longer emitted their eery and electric phosphorescence. The couch of Saracen fabrics, on which Gaspard had beheld the dying dwarf, was now half hidden from view by the mounting fumes of braziers and thuribles, amid which the sorcerer's ten pupils, clad in sable and scarlet, were performing their hideous and repugnant rite, with its malefically measured litany.

FEARFULLY, as one who confronts an apparition reared up from nether hell, Gaspard beheld the colossus that lay inert as if in Cyclopean sleep on the castle flags. The thing was no longer a skeleton: the limbs were rounded into bossed, enormous thews, like the limbs of Biblical giants; the flanks were like an insuperable wall; the deltoids of the mighty chest were broad as platforms; the hands could have crushed the bodies of men like millstones. . . . *But the face of the stupendous monster, seen in profile athwart the pouring moon, was the face of the Satanic dwarf, Nathaire—re-magnified a hundred times, but the same in its implacable madness and malevolence!*

The vast bosom seemed to rise and fall; and during a pause of the necromantic ritual, Gaspard heard the unmistakable sound of a mighty respiration. The eye in the profile was closed; but its lid appeared to tremble like a great curtain, as if the monster were about to awake; and the outflung hand, with fingers pale and bluish as a row of corpses, twitched unquietly on the castle flags.

An insupportable terror seized the watcher; but even this terror could not induce him to return to the noisome vaults he had left. With infinite hesitation and trepidation, he stole forth from the corner, keeping in a zone of ebon shadow that flanked the castle wall.

As he went, he saw for a moment, through bellying folds of vapor, the couch on which the shrunken form of Nathaire was lying pallid and motionless. It seemed that the dwarf was dead, or had fallen into a stupor preceding death. Then the choral voices, crying their dreadful incantation, rose higher in Satanic triumph; the vapors eddied like a hell-born cloud, coiling about the sorcerers in python-shaped volumes, and hiding again the Orient couch and its corpse-like occupant.

A thralldom of measureless evil oppressed the air. Gaspard felt that the awful transmigration, evoked and implored with ever-swelling, liturgic blasphemies, was about to take place—had perhaps already occurred. He thought

that the breathing giant stirred, like one who tosses in light slumber.

Soon the towering, massively recumbent bulk was interposed between Gaspard and the chanting necromancers. They had not seen him; and he now dared to run swiftly, and gained the courtyard unpursued and unchallenged. Thence, without looking back, he fled like a devil-hunted thing upon the steep and chasm-riven slopes below Ylourgne.

7. The Coming of the Colossus

AFTER the cessation of the exodus of liches, a universal terror still prevailed; a wide-flung shadow of apprehension, infernal and funereal, lay stagnantly on Averoigne. There were strange and disastrous portents in the aspect of the skies: flame-bearded meteors had been seen to fall beyond the eastern hills; a comet, far in the south, had swept the stars with its luminous bosom for a few nights, and had then faded, leaving among men the prophecy of bale and pestilence to come. By day the air was oppressed and sultry, and the blue heavens were heated as if by whitish fires. Clouds of thunder, darkling and withdrawn, shook their fulgurant lances on the far horizons, like some beleaguering Titan army. A murrain, such as would come from the working of wizard spells, was abroad among the cattle. All these signs and prodigies were an added heaviness on the burdened spirits of men, who went to and fro in daily fear of the hidden preparations and machinations of hell.

But, until the actual breaking-forth of the incubated menace, there was no one, save Gaspard du Nord, who had knowledge of its veritable form. And Gaspard, fleeing headlong beneath the gibbous moon toward Vyones, and fearing to hear the tread of a colossal pursuer at any moment, had thought it more than useless to give warning in such towns and villages as lay upon his line of flight. Where, indeed—even if warned—could men hope to hide themselves from the awful thing, begotten by Hell on the ravished charnel, that would walk forth like the Anakim to visit its roaring wrath on a trampled world?

So, all that night, and throughout the day that followed, Gaspard du Nord, with the dried slime of the oubliette on his briar-shredded raiment, plunged like a madman through the towering woods that were haunted by robbers and werewolves. The westward-falling moon flickered in his eyes betwixt the gnarled, somber boles as he ran; and the dawn overtook him with the pale shafts of its searching arrows. The noon poured over him its white sultriness, like furnace-heated metal sublimed into light; and the clotted filth that clung to his tatters was again turned into slime by his own sweat. But still he pursued his nightmare-harried way, while a vague, seemingly hopeless plan took form in his mind.

IN THE interim, several monks of the Cistercian brotherhood, watching the gray walls of Ylourgne at early dawn with their habitual vigilance, were the first, after Gaspard, to behold the monstrous horror created by the necromancers. Their account may have been somewhat tinged by a pious exaggeration; but they swore that the giant rose abruptly, standing more than waist-high above the ruins of the barbican, amid a sudden leaping of long-tongued fires and a swirling of pitchy fumes erupted from Malebolge. The giant's head was level with the high top of the donjon, and his right arm, outthrust, lay like a bar of stormy cloud athwart the new-risen sun.

The monks fell grovelling to their

knees, thinking that the Archfoe himself had come forth, using Ylourgne for his gateway from the Pit. Then, across the mile-wide valley, they heard a thunderous peal of demoniac laughter; and the giant, climbing over the mounded barbican at a single step, began to descend the scarped and craggy hill.

When he drew nearer, bounding from slope to slope, his features were manifestly those of some great devil animated with ire and malice toward the sons of Adam. His hair, in matted locks, streamed behind him like a mass of black pythons; his naked skin was livid and pale and cadaverous, like the skin of the dead; but beneath it, the stupendous thews of a Titan swelled and rippled. The eyes, wide and glaring, flamed like lidless cauldrons heated by the fires of the unplumbed Pit.

The rumor of his coming passed like a gale of terror through the Monastery. Many of the Brothers, deeming discretion the better part of religious fervor, hid themselves in the stone-hewn cellars and vaults. Others crouched in their cells, mumbling and shrieking incoherent pleas to all the Saints. Still others, the most courageous, repaired in a body to the chapel and knelt in solemn prayer before the wooden Christ on the great crucifix.

Bernard and Stéphane, now somewhat recovered from their grievous beating, alone dared to watch the advance of the giant. Their horror was inexpressibly increased when they began to recognize in the colossal features a magnified likeness to the lineaments of that evil dwarf who had presided over the dark, unhallowed activities of Ylourgne; and the laughter of the colossus, as he came down the valley, was like a tempest-borne echo of the damnable cachinnation that had followed their ignominious flight from the haunted stronghold. To Bernard and Stéphane, however, it seemed merely that the dwarf, who was no doubt an actual demon, had chosen to appear in his natural form.

Pausing in the valley-bottom, the giant stood opposite the monastery with his flame-filled eyes on a level with the window from which Bernard and Stéphane were peering. He laughed again—an awful laugh, like a subterranean rumbling—and then, stooping, he picked up a handful of boulders as if they had been pebbles, and proceeded to pelt the monastery. The boulders crashed against the walls, as if hurled from great catapults or mangonels of war; but the stout building held, though shaken grievously.

Then, with both hands, the colossus tore loose an immense rock that was deeply embedded in the hillside; and lifting this rock, he flung it at the stubborn walls. The tremendous mass broke in an entire side of the chapel; and those who had gathered therein were found later, crushed into bloody pulp amid the splinters of their carven Christ.

After that, as if disdaining to palter any further with a prey so insignificant, the colossus turned his back on the little monastery, and like some fiend-born Goliath, went roaring down the valley into Averoigne.

As he departed, Bernard and Stéphane, still watching from their window, saw a thing they had not perceived heretofore: a huge basket made of planking, that hung suspended by ropes between the giant's shoulders. In the basket, ten men—the pupils and assistants of Nathaire—were being carried like so many dolls or puppets in a peddler's pack.

OF THE subsequent wanderings and depradations of the colossus, a hundred legends were long current throughout Averoigne: tales of an unexampled ghastliness, a wanton diabolism without

parallel in all the histories of that demon-pestered land.

The goatherds of the hills below Ylourgne saw him coming, and fled with their nimble-footed flocks to the highest ridges. To these he paid little heed, merely trampling them down like beetles when they could not escape from his path. Following the hill-stream that was the source of the river Isoile, he came to the verge of the great forest; and here, it is related, he tore up a towering ancient pine by the roots, and snapping off the mighty boughs with his hands, shaped it into a cudgel which he carried henceforward.

With this cudgel, heavier than a battering-ram, he pounded into shapeless ruin a wayside shrine in the outer woods. A hamlet fell in his way, and he strode through it, beating in the roofs, toppling the walls, and crushing the inhabitants beneath his feet.

To and fro in a mad frenzy of destruction, like a death-drunken Cyclops, he wandered all that day. Even the fierce beasts of the woodland ran from him in fear. The wolves, in mid-hunt, abandoned their quarry and retired, howling dismally with terror, to their rocky dens. The black, savage hunting-dogs of the forest barons would not face him, and hid whimpering in their kennels.

Men heard his mighty laughter, his stormy bellowing; they saw his approach from a distance of many leagues, and fled or concealed themselves as best they could. The lords of moated castles called in their men-at-arms, drew up their drawbridges and prepared as if for the siege of an army. The peasants hid themselves in caverns, in cellars, in old wells, and even beneath hay-mounds, hoping that he would pass them by unnoticed. The churches were crammed with refugees who sought the protection of the Cross, deeming that Satan himself, or one of his chief lieutenants, had risen to harry and lay waste the land.

In a voice like summer thunder, mad maledictions, unthinkable obscenities and blasphemies were uttered ceaselessly by the giant as he went to and fro. Men heard him address the litter of black-clad figures that he carried on his back, in tones of admonishment or demonstration such as a master would use to his pupils. People who had known Nathaire recognized the incredible likeness of the huge features, the similarity of the swollen voice, to his. A rumor went abroad that the dwarf sorcerer, through his loathly bond with the Adversary, had been permitted to transfer his hateful soul into this Titanic form; and, bearing his pupils with him, had returned to vent an insatiable ire, a bottomless rancor, on the world that had mocked him for his puny physique and reviled him for his sorcery. The charnel genesis of the monstrous avatar was also rumored; and, indeed, it was said that the colossus had openly proclaimed his identity.

IT WOULD be tedious to make explicit mention of all the enormities, all the atrocities, that were ascribed to the marauding giant. . . . There were people —mostly priests and women, it is told— whom he picked up as they fled, and pulled limb from limb as a child might quarter an insect. . . . And there were worse things, not to be named in this record. . . .

Many eye-witnesses told how he hunted Pierre, the Lord of La Frênaie, who had gone forth with his dogs and men to chase a noble stag in the near-by forest. Overtaking horse and rider, he caught them with one hand, and bearing them aloft as he strode over the tree-tops, he hurled them later against the granite

walls of the Château of La Frênaie in passing. Then, catching the red stag that Pierre had hunted, he flung it after them; and the huge bloody blotches made by the impact of the pashed bodies remained long on the castle stone, and were never wholly washed away by the autumn rains and the winter snows.

Countless tales were told, also, of the deeds of obscene sacrilege and profanation committed by the colossus: of the wooden Virgin that he flung into the Isoile above Ximes, lashed with human gut to the rotting, mail-clad body of an infamous outlaw; of the wormy corpses that he dug with his hands from unconsecrated graves and hurled into the courtyard of the Benedictine abbey of Perigon; of the Church of Ste. Zenobie, which he buried with its priests and congregation beneath a mountain of ordure made by the gathering of all the dungheaps from neighboring farms.

8. *The Laying of the Colossus*

BACK and forth, in an irregular, drunken, zigzag course, from end to end and side to side of the harried realm, the giant strode without pause, like an energumen possessed by some implacable fiend of mischief and murder, leaving behind him, as a reaper leaves his swath, an ever-lengthening zone of havoc, of rapine and carnage. And when the sun, blackened by the smoke of burning villages, had set luridly beyond the forest, men still saw him moving in the dusk, and heard still the portentous rumbling of his mad, stormy cachinnation.

Nearing the gates of Vyones at sunset, Gaspard du Nord saw behind him, through gaps in the ancient wood, the far-off head and shoulders of the terrible colossus, who moved along the Isoile, stooping from sight at intervals in some horrid deed.

Though numb with weariness and exhaustion, Gaspard quickened his flight. He did not believe, however, that the monster would try to invade Vyones, the especial object of Nathaire's hatred and malice, before the following day. The evil soul of the sorcerous dwarf, exulting in its almost infinite capacity for harm and destruction, would defer the crowning act of vengeance, and would continue to terrorize, during the night, the outlying villages and rural districts.

In spite of his rags and filth, which rendered him practically unrecognizable and gave him a most disreputable air, Gaspard was admitted without question by the guards at the city gate. Vyones was already thronged with people who had fled to the sanctuary of its stout walls from the adjacent countryside; and no one, not even of the most dubious character, was denied admittance. The walls were lined with archers and pike-bearers, gathered in readiness to dispute the entrance of the giant. Crossbowmen were stationed above the gates, and mangonels were mounted at short intervals along the entire circuit of the ramparts. The city seethed and hummed like an agitated hive.

Hysteria and pandemonium prevailed in the streets. Pale, panic-stricken faces milled everywhere in an aimless stream. Hurrying torches flared dolorously in the twilight that deepened as if with the shadow of impending wings arisen from Erebus. The gloom was clogged with intangible fear, with webs of stifling oppression. Through all this rout of wild disorder and frenzy, Gaspard, like a spent but indomitable swimmer breasting some tide of eternal, viscid nightmare, made his way slowly to his attic lodgings.

Afterward, he could scarcely remember eating and drinking. Overworn beyond the limit of bodily and spiritual endur-

ance, he threw himself down on his pallet without removing his ooze-stiffened tatters, and slept soddenly till an hour half-way between midnight and dawn.

He awoke with the death-pale beams of the gibbous moon shining upon him through his window; and rising, spent the balance of the night in making certain occult preparations which, he felt, offered the only possibility of coping with the fiendish monster that had been created and animated by Nathaire.

Working feverishly by the light of the westering moon and a single dim taper, Gaspard assembled various ingredients of familiar alchemic use which he possessed, and compounded from these, through a long and somewhat cabalistic process, a dark-gray powder which he had seen employed by Nathaire on numerous occasions. He had reasoned that the colossus, being formed from the bones and flesh of dead men unlawfully raised up, and energized only by the soul of a dead sorcerer, would be subject to the influence of this powder, which Nathaire had used for the laying of resurrected liches. The powder, if cast in the nostrils of such cadavers, would cause them to return peacefully to their tombs and lie down in a renewed slumber of death.

Gaspard made a considerable quantity of the mixture, arguing that no mere finger-pinch would suffice for the lulling of the gigantic charnel monstrosity. His guttering yellow candle was dimmed by the white dawn as he ended the Latin formula of fearsome verbal invocation from which the compound would derive much of its efficacy. The formula, which called for the co-operation of Alastor and other evil spirits, he used with unwillingness. But he knew that there was no alternative: sorcery could be fought only with sorcery.

MORNING came with new terrors to Vyones. Gaspard had felt, through a sort of intuition, that the vengeful colossus, who was said to have wandered with unhuman tirelessness and diabolic energy all night through Averoigne, would approach the hated city early in the day. His intuition was confirmed; for scarcely had he finished his occult labors when he heard a mounting hubbub in the streets, and above the shrill, dismal clamor of frightened voices, the far-off roaring of the giant.

Gaspard knew that he must lose no time, if he were to post himself in a place of vantage from which he could throw his powder into the nostrils of the hundred-foot colossus. The city walls, and even most of the church spires, were not lofty enough for this purpose; and a brief reflection told him that the great cathedral, standing at the core of Vyones, was the one place from whose roof he could front the invader with success. He felt sure that the men-at-arms on the walls could do little to prevent the monster from entering and wreaking his malevolent will. No earthly weapon could injure a being of such bulk and nature; for even a cadaver of normal size, reared up in this fashion, could be shot full of arrows or transfixed by a dozen pikes without retarding its progress.

Hastily he filled a huge leathern pouch with the powder; and carrying the pouch at his belt, he joined the agitated press of people in the street. Many were fleeing toward the cathedral, to seek the shelter of its august sanctity; and he had only to let himself be borne along by the frenzy-driven stream.

The cathedral nave was packed with worshippers, and solemn masses were being said by priests whose voices faltered at times with inward panic. Unheeded by the wan, despairing throng,

Gaspard found a flight of coiling stairs that led tortuously to the gargoyle-warded roof of the high tower.

Here he posted himself, crouching behind the stone figure of a cat-headed griffin. From his vantage he could see, beyond the crowded spires and gables, the approaching giant, whose head and torso loomed above the city walls. A cloud of arrows, visible even at that distance, rose to meet the monster, who apparently did not even pause to pluck them from his hide. Great boulders hurled from mangonels were no more to him than a pelting of gravel; the heavy bolts of arbalests, embedded in his flesh, were mere slivers.

Nothing could stay his advance. The tiny figures of a company of pikemen, who opposed him with outthrust weapons, were swept from the wall above the eastern gate by a single sidelong blow of the seventy-foot pine that he bore for a cudgel. Then, having cleared the wall, the colossus climbed over it into Vyones.

Roaring, chuckling, laughing like a maniacal Cyclops, he strode along the narrow streets between houses that rose only to his waist, trampling without mercy everyone who could not escape in time, and smashing in the roofs with stupendous blows of his bludgeon. With a push of his left hand he broke off the protruding gables, and overturned the church steeples with their bells clanging in dolorous alarm as they went down. A woful shrieking and wailing of hysteria-laden voices accompanied his passing.

Straight toward the cathedral he came, as Gaspard had calculated, feeling that the high edifice would be made the special butt of his malevolence.

THE streets were now emptied of people; but, as if to hunt them out and crush them in their hiding-places, the giant thrust his cudgel like a battering-ram through walls and windows and roofs as he went by. The ruin and havoc that he left was indescribable.

Soon he loomed opposite the cathedral tower on which Gaspard waited behind the gargoyle. His head was level with the tower, and his eyes flamed like wells of burning brimstone as he drew near. His lips were parted over stalactitic fangs in a hateful snarl; and he cried out in a voice like the rumbling of articulate thunder:

"Ho! ye puling priests and devotees of a powerless God! Come forth and bow to Nathaire the master, before he sweeps you into limbo!"

It was then that Gaspard, with a hardihood beyond comparison, rose from his hiding-place and stood in full view of the raging colossus.

"Draw nearer, Nathaire, if indeed it be you, foul robber of tombs and charnels," he taunted. "Come close, for I would hold speech with you."

A monstrous look of astonishment dimmed the diabolic rage on the colossal features. Peering at Gaspard as if in doubt or incredulity, the giant lowered his lifted cudgel and stepped close to the tower, till his face was only a few feet from the intrepid student. Then, when he had apparently convinced himself of Gaspard's identity, the look of maniacal wrath returned, flooding his eyes with Tartarean fire and twisting his lineaments into a mask of Apollyon-like malignity. His left arm came up in a prodigious arc, with twitching fingers that poised horribly above the head of the youth, casting upon him a vulture-black shadow in the full-risen sun. Gaspard saw the white, startled faces of the necromancer's pupils, peering over his shoulder from their plank-built basket.

"Is it you, Gaspard, my recreant pupil?" the colossus roared stormily. "I thought you were rotting in the oubliette beneath Ylourgne—and now I find you perched atop of this accursed cathedral which I am about to demolish! . . . You had been far wiser to remain where I left you, my good Gaspard."

His breath, as he spoke, blew like a charnel-polluted gale on the student. His vast fingers, with blackened nails like shovel-blades, hovered in ogreish menace. Gaspard had furtively loosened his leathern pouch that hung at his belt, and had untied its mouth. Now, as the twitching fingers descended toward him, he emptied the contents of the pouch in the giant's face, and the fine powder, mounting in a dark-gray cloud, obscured the snarling lips and palpitating nostrils from his view.

Anxiously he watched the effect, fearing that the powder might be useless after all, against the superior arts and Satanical resources of Nathaire. But miraculously, as it seemed, the evil lambence died in the pit-deep eyes, as the monster inhaled the flying cloud. His lifted hand, narrowly missing the crouching youth in its sweep, fell lifelessly at his side. The anger was erased from the mighty, contorted mask, as if from the face of a dead man; the great cudgel fell with a crash to the empty street; and then, with drowsy, lurching steps and listless, hanging arms, the giant turned his back to the cathedral and retraced his way through the devastated city.

He muttered dreamily to himself as he went; and people who heard him swore that the voice was no longer the awful, thunder-swollen voice of Nathaire, but the tones and accents of a multitude of men, amid which the voices of certain of the ravished dead were recognizable. And the voice of Nathaire himself, no louder now than in life, was heard at intervals through the manifold mutterings, as if protesting angrily.

Climbing the eastern wall as it had come, the colossus went to and fro for many hours, no longer wreaking a hellish wrath and rancor, but searching, as people thought, for the various tombs and graves from which the hundreds of bodies that composed it had been so foully reft. From charnel to charnel, from cemetery to cemetery it went, through all the land; but there was no grave anywhere in which the dead colossus could lie down.

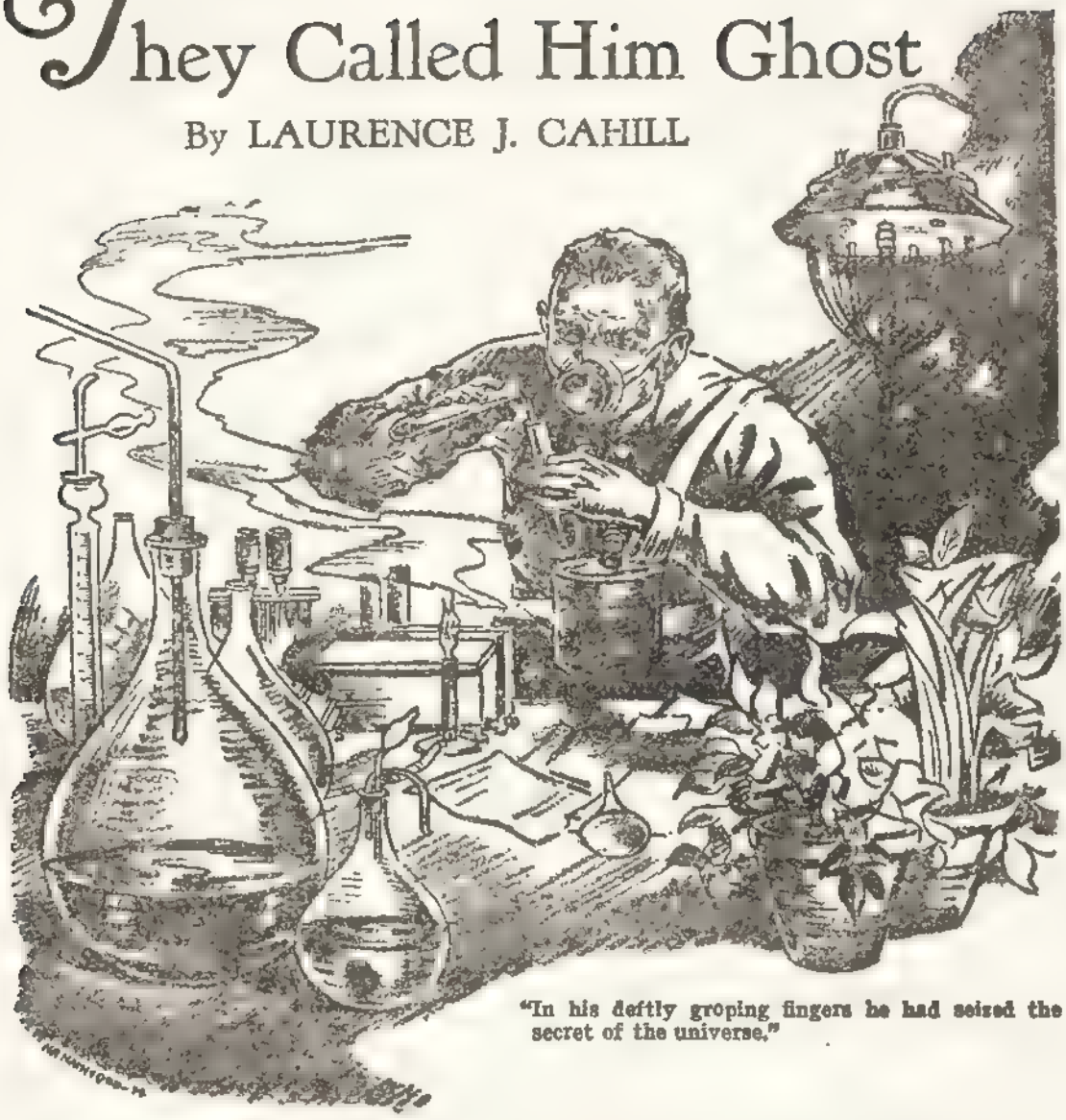
Then, toward evening, men saw it from afar on the red rim of the sky, digging with its hands in the soft, loamy plain beside the river Isoile. There, in a monstrous and self-made grave, the colossus laid itself down, and did not rise again. The ten pupils of Nathaire, it was believed, unable to descend from their basket, were crushed beneath the mighty body; for none of them was ever seen thereafter.

FOR many days no one dared to approach the place where the corpse lay uncovered in its self-dug grave. And so the thing rotted prodigiously beneath the summer sun, breeding a mighty stench that wrought pestilence in that portion of Averoigne. And they who ventured to go near in the following autumn, when the stench had lessened greatly, swore that the voice of Nathaire, still protesting angrily, was heard by them to issue from the enormous, rook-haunted bulk.

Of Gaspard du Nord, who had been the savior of the province, it was related that he lived in much honor to a ripe age, being the one sorcerer of that region who at no time incurred the disapprobation of the Church.

They Called Him Ghost

By LAURENCE J. CAHILL



"In his deftly groping fingers he had seized the secret of the universe."

An utterly different story—the tale of the most amazing scientific discovery ever made, and the strange being—or beings—that stormed into Goeste Hall every thirty years

WHAT I discovered in the fading light of yesterday's sunset is keeping me stunned in nerve and muscle. Tamper with mysteries, ye who dare! and begrudge not what ye find. There is reason for the icy circulation running in my veins this morning.

"And what is there to be afraid of?" argued Hatch—I can hear his silky voice very much as if it were beside me now—"when night-time is the same as broad daylight, only the sun isn't shining?"

I confess I nearly took him at his word. And the Devil himself can witness how nearly fatal that was. I am alive, all that's necessary for the present, and Hatch can't prevent this being written. For the power is at last on *my* side,

and I have more of the true facts now than Hatch or anyone else has. There is a lot of meat in that saying, "A little knowledge is a dangerous thing." But my conscience urges me to tell something of what I know.

What man since time began has looked on as strange a sight as I saw last night?

All matters proceed from cause and effect. Remember everything has an explanation as sensible as the 2 and 2 that make 4. What I know this morning numbs me with its reality, and I would be a liar to deny it. Yet I don't expect to surrender to fright, and I'm not intending to quit this house.

The secret of the attic is out, and the *thing* that sought to get into that attic lies up in that desolate place now on the unvarnished floor. For the sixth time I've gone up and looked at it lying there, and I'm wondering just what to do. That's a direct challenge, and I was ready enough for challenges when I came here.

I say "ready," but when I boast on that point I am inaccurate. The enemy was clever and without a word almost compelled me to hand him my full-loaded Colt. Had I let him have the gun I would have become another victim in the mystery of Goeste Hall.

I came here with a charred and crumbled scrap of paper for a guide, an unsigned document on which was written the address of this house and a number of unfinished sentences. In this house something of staggering value was hidden, said the document.

Where that curiously wordy document had been before it reached me I'll never learn. Fire and smoke had given it a black deckle-edge. Sufficient to say that it passed from hand to hand as a "joke" and finally ended its wanderings in my office, where nothing merely puzzling is called a joke until it is looked at twice. The result of it was that I came here to find out where that treasure of staggering value was hidden and what it might be. And I found that the house was shunned because of a reputation for grisly danger. And the legend of the house was a riddle that no one guessed the answer of. The house "wasn't natural" and was about to be broken up and removed because it kept the land from being purchasable.

A house that "isn't natural" is a house steeped in a ghost story.

In the nick of time I bought the house before the wreckers arrived, and I settled down to live here until its mystery was solved. The danger would be mine alone. And so would be the victory.

Information which I manufactured and gave to newspapers spread all over three states the news that Goeste Hall had lately found a buyer not afraid of ghosts.

I was sniffing the flavor of this riddle and asking danger to pay a call if it cared to.

I WAITED for a week.

Then along came a stranger who introduced himself as Hatch, and said, "Interesting place." He paused. "Do you want to sell it?"

Whether upon the wrong track or right on the heels of a hunch, I took in every visible detail of Hatch's appearance before I spoke.

I said, "No."

The face of this fellow Hatch changed slightly at my retort.

"Your answer is 'No'?"

I said, "My answer is 'No'."

Things I had heard and things I had been told seemed very close then, and I could smell their warning closer every second. The riddle of this house as explained to me was a legend that stuck up its head every thirty years or so, and according to the signs it was due to repeat

soon. There were people who pretended to laugh at it, but they were well-meaning people who not only wouldn't live here on a bet but who would shudder at the idea itself. In the matter of the riddle, there was good indication that there was something real about it somewhere. Evidence doesn't have to be rounded off and complete to be convincing. I had that fire-curled document which had passed uncomprehended through so many hands — and I was holding it for that grim moment when peril ought to be followed by triumph. If I won, I hoped I would carry no grievous scars. If I died trying, I hoped I'd die quickly.

To untangle the rest of the riddle was my job.

In 1813 the man who owned this house was crippled for life by an unknown assailant who tried to break in and get up into the attic. In 1842 someone else owned this property, and in that year a stranger killed a watch-dog and nearly strangled a servant in undertaking to enter the house and reach the attic. The year 1875 saw the third attempt take place—a heedless and very bloody effort by someone never identified who fought to get into the attic. By that time the house was locked and barred and pretty well fortified to protect those who lived in it.

All the countryside knew the evidence. What did it mean? What was in the attic to attract dangerous strangers? The something of staggering value, so it looked. Yet nobody had ever found it. And although armed with a difficult key to the riddle, I had been unable to find that hidden something myself in the short time since I had bought the house—and I had looked well.

True to the legend, in 1907 a man never seen before in that generation called at the house and made a desperate dash for the attic. A whirlwind battle ended in his running away and escaping just as police arrived.

The legend is exactly the same every time. One hundred and twenty-one years ago someone with the ferocity of a madman had sought to get into that region upstairs, by way of this door. The same thing had happened every thirty years or so since, and with the old typical touch and treatment. Were they different men each time? Thirty years is a long span apart. Most men well into their full-grown years drop off to the grave before another thirty years pass by. Nevertheless, the ghostly flavor of this riddle grows plain in the suspicion that some particular *one*, and not a train of men, wanted to get into the attic of this ancient house. The graybeards in the village believed that someone had clearly been trying over a century, making his eery attempts to force his way toward some secret no one else had discovered, then lying low for thirty years, and trying again, again and again. The same fellow every time. Not a human being; that's the point. Mortals don't live for a hundred and twenty-one years.

Nothing had occurred since 1907—but the usual thirty-year interval was almost gone by.

Hatch was the only visitor I had had, and I didn't know him from Adam. Why would he want to buy the place?

"Nope," I said to Hatch. "And I guess that's going to be final."

And I stretched my hand out behind the door, into the costumer, and picked up a pistol which I shoved without being seen into my pocket. Pistols and sometimes, so it was said, sawed-off shotguns had been kept in costumers behind this iron-bolted front door for other owners fearful of the thirty-year visitor.

Hatch muttered to himself my answer.

"All right, all right," he agreed, and he smiled. He stepped back a couple of paces and cast his glance over the house swiftly. His turned-up chin was like the business edge of a chisel, and I saw that his whole face was sharp. His age would have been around thirty-five, making him a year or two younger than myself.

"I walked all the way from town to see your place, Mr.—Mr.—er——"

I kept a cynical silence, said nothing.

"Mr. Carter," he succeeded at last. That he was here for a purpose I had already taken for granted, and in the course of events there was no question but that he had learned my name somehow.

"Would you object if I asked to look at the inside of this building called Goeste Hall?" He smiled more brightly than ever, but I felt there was a resolute earnestness beneath his features. "I'd be glad to look at an old house as handsome as this."

It's a long walk from town. "Come in," I said.

He thanked me dryly and stepped with an almost cautious tread through the door. It was a little after six in the evening.

Hand still in pocket, I noiselessly slid back the hammer on my pistol and let it down again.

"You have been told this is Goeste Hall?" I asked, calling it *Gest* as is the habit with people living near here.

He was sniffing deeply and excitedly. "Yes; it's kind of a show place in this part of the state, they tell me."

I nodded.

A STRANGE tingling gripped me. Was this fellow Hatch the newest sign of that extraordinary legend that went with the house? How much of it was really hidden from me? What did I have yet to learn and what stuff was I gambling with?

"Start downstairs," I advised. "And you can look at the top floors later."

It might be to my advantage to see what this soft-spoken fellow named Hatch would do.

He obeyed my suggestion, and I got the notion that his interest in the lower floor was only half genuine, while I watched him closely. His talk was careful, as if he was mindful not to say something different or unusual. But one careless slip he made and I felt the hair on my neck slowly stir and rise. When crossing through this hall he turned toward that tall white door there, that leads to the attic, and then immediately corrected his direction.

For a moment he had been heading for the attic.

As I thought of it, I had to allow that in ninety-nine guesses out of a hundred it wouldn't have meant anything. Between that white door and the attic is part of the second floor. He might have only intended to inspect the first floor and the second floor with no thought in any way of the attic. A casual mistake, perhaps, his turning toward that door before seeing the rest of the ground floor—except that his conduct wasn't casual. He turned away from that door too quickly, determined not to let me guess what he really wanted.

Neither of us spoke in that silence. I kept my mouth shut, but my brain seemed to be yelling. My paragraph in the newspapers had worked, had hurried the thirty-year visitor to his task again. This certain party was trying to get into the attic, as he had tried in 1813, and in 1875, and 1842, and 1907. The mysterious and terrible stranger was here just as decidedly as the minute then dragging

out its sixty seconds, and he was forcing me, and I was facing him.

He had come for that something of staggering value hidden in the attic.

What did that dilapidated, carelessly scorched document which I possessed really tell me? Nothing but the location of this house and a jumble of fire-bitten sentences. Such writing as, "Truth lets itself be seen in one flash and then men forget. They name it the nightmare or a day-dream. If they recognized it as the great secret. . . . As certain as the circulation of the blood and the beat of the pulse, it comes despite birth and death, in its allotted time."

Cloudy, hazy sentences, meaning nothing, but hinting at something colossal.

This house of legends and riddles and secrets. A cheerless bargain. I now owned it. The mystery was mine to leave alone or grapple with.

Who was this Hatch?

Fast as the sun was setting, light remained to permit me to see his features well. "Calls himself Hatch; he's a man like myself," I thought without being immediately convinced. Even though I believed in a sane summing up of everything, I wasn't certain, wasn't too certain.

Never in my life had I had cause to be cold-sure there are matters that are supernatural. The voice of my soul kept saying, "There can not be anything supernatural about any of this." But my judgment was jarred and sickened. Common sense struggled hard. By force of reason, looking at Hatch, I couldn't stomach the idea that he was different from me.

A puzzle, but strictly a human puzzle. I was arguing against my own doubts. It helps to talk to yourself, but you've got to talk fast!

I must keep cool. No need was plainer than that. Having made a gesture in the newspaper items about myself buying Goeste Hall, I was positive that some day the ageless baffling visitor would return. What he would look like I hadn't been able to imagine. In spite of all his knocking on this front door for intervals covering at least a century and a quarter, he must for ever hold on to his diabolical strength—for he never weakened with age and he was always likely to attack violently.

What was in the attic that he wanted?

Attack, violently. Pretending that he had not gone to the door at the foot of the attic staircase, Hatch stood in a quiet attitude with open hands at his sides. Violence, none. Self-controlled. Canny and crafty. In the four times he had been at this house he had learned something. Hatch-or-whatever-his-name-was was making haste more slowly, not making his bloody effort with the foolish clumsy impatience that ruined him four times before.

A FEW seconds went by. It must have been like a year to both of us. Tongue silent, I said in my own thoughts, "Hatch, here is one fool who is going to find out what you're after. But if anybody gets hurt it'll be we two fools together, not one."

Pocketed in my coat, the stock of the pistol was slippery with the sweat from my hand.

"Suppose you tell me, Mr. Hatch, why you are in this house?"

Delay I figured would only waste time, and on that assumption I made the first move.

His face gave a dull response to my question, as much as to say he didn't begin to understand me, and the hat he held clutched in the tips of his fingers loosened in that clutch and slid to the floor.

As he stooped to pick up his hat I bent forward myself to get every mood revealed in his expression. Papers sprayed out of his coat and at the same time the pistol plunged out of my pocket. They lay between us on the carpet, papers and pistol.

Quicker than I usually act, I recovered the gun and cased it again where it had been.

Hatch fumbled and lifted the stuff he had dropped at his feet. He saw me replace the gun, and an effect of some kind crossed his face. But he was smart. His eyes were dull and steady.

"Those papers of yours show diagrams of the plan of a house," I said. "And I've got a notion I saw the name of Goeste Hall, too, written upon them."

"Quite right, Mr. Carter," he replied. His voice was deliberate.

"What about it?" I challenged.

He swallowed. His eyes were still like stone and very steady. "Why are you carrying that gun, Carter?"

I was impressed by the artfulness of this caller Hatch in trying to put me on the defensive instead of answering my question. I didn't allow this strategy to trip me.

"What are you here for, Hatch?" I repeated.

In the middle of another swallow he changed expression and grinned suddenly. "Don't tell me, Mr. Carter, that the legend of this house is scaring you?"

Playing up to that cue, I grinned myself. "No part of it, Hatch. Nothing scares me. But I'm living here with the sole purpose of finding out what it is you want. And what you wanted over one hundred years ago."

Hatch chuckled quietly. "I understand." He looked leisurely around the ceilings and walls. "I don't blame you. A place like this with a ghost tag on it would get anybody uneasy."

Possibly some fifty inches separated us as we stood here talking. And I decided that if Hatch came closer I'd do well to strike him down first and figure it out afterward.

"You know there is a legend of an eternal and inhuman visitor to this house," I said to him. "Are you willing to spill what you know?"

"Why would I refuse?" Hatch smiled indulgently. "I don't have to. There are no ghosts in this house. A misunderstanding, maybe."

"Thank heaven we're getting somewhere," I re-countered in the best of humor. "And what is the misunderstanding?"

"Anything I know about the mystery of this house is yours, gratis, Mr. Carter," he offered. "Mind if I sit down when I say it?"

I nodded to that chair on the other side of this hall. It was still fifty inches away.

"Carter," said Hatch, chuckling, and swinging one foot with an odd lightness, "do you think I'm a ghost?"

The temperature of the hall was forty degrees below blood heat and I shivered at that moment.

"You are going to tell me what you're here for," I replied.

Hatch's shoulders hunched casually.

"Charles Goeste, the man who built this place," he spoke with easy acquaintance, "was a pioneer in botany. He lived in 1783 and he was crazy about plants. Not much deviltry to that, eh? He knew more about plants than any other man in his day, and a lot more than any man has learned up to this time. He was selfish, close-mouthed. Except for an assistant of his, named Luke, no one else ever shared his work. Other botanists came to Charles Goeste for information, but

they never got any. They knew he made records of what he did in several notebooks, which he probably kept in the attic here where he worked. And when he died they sought to get at those notebooks—and because I'm a botanist myself, Mr. Carter, you see me here this evening hoping to find what they sought."

I didn't take my eyes off Hatch's face. "Simple, isn't it, Mr. Carter?"

Certainly. Too simple. Even if I had been a total stranger to the case, that kind of plausible story would have reeked with suspicion. What was I to do? Talk and with presence of mind keep on talking. Each of us was trying to throw the other off his guard.

"These men," I reviewed, "who called at the house and who wanted to rummage the attic in the years 1813, 1842 and 1907, were botanists? After nothing else but Charles Goeste's tame secrets about plant-growing?"

Hatch shrugged. "What else? Isn't that more sensible than a foolish ghost story, Mr. Carter?"

I let that go. "Nevertheless, Hatch," I remarked, "there was a murder committed here in the early days of this house."

"There was," he admitted quietly.

"How do you know?" I parried.

He changed his position and I saw that for the first time he was startled and unprepared. But his voice was bland.

"Nobody can be sure," he evaded with a prankish grin. "Charles Goeste was jealous of his discoveries. Perhaps he murdered his assistant, Luke. A visiting botanist might have been killed by Goeste in a professional argument. An accident might have looked like a murder. I don't believe any of it, myself. You'll have to agree that botanists aren't men of bloodthirsty traits."

HATCH was a liar. Of that I was sure. My right hand didn't shift from the gun warming in the pocket of my coat.

And suddenly Hatch made a light statement that gave me an unexpected jolt. "I have a notion, Mr. Carter, that the reason a legend has been created about this house is that Charles Goeste's name was pronounced differently when he was alive. Today they call this place *Gest* Hall, and when they speak of its builder they call him Charles *Gest*. But in 1783, when he was living, they called him *Ghost*. See?"

At just about that time upon my shoulders approaching evening settled clammily like the pressure of a million fingers.

I knew Hatch missed nothing as he saw me wince with irritation. "A man's name is spelled G-O-E-S-T-E, and it's pronounced *Ghost*. For intelligent adults such as us, Mr. Carter, that's silly. We have no truck with the kind of people who fear the darkness and evil spirits. And what is there to be afraid of," he purred, "when night-time is the same as broad daylight, only the sun isn't shining?"

Sound, sensible logic, given with a laugh, is like throwing cold water on a foolishly glowing imagination. It was almost a relief to wriggle out of this with the conclusion that there was no mystery, no riddle, and no secret thing in the attic.

Very vague and useless seemed those sentences: "Truth lets itself be seen in one flash and then men forget. They name it the nightmare or a day-dream. If they recognize it as the great secret. . . . As certain as the circulation of the blood and the beat of the pulse, it comes despite birth and death, in its allotted time."

What was that battered document worth? It had been laid on my desk because others had knit their brows and then laughed at it. The ravings of an

untraceable and long-forgotten maniac, they had agreed. Were they right? Was Hatch's story true?

Vigilance slowly being undermined, I began to get disgusted with myself for the dramatic way I was elaborating this visit of a man interested only in plants.

It would have taken little enough time for me to lift the pistol from my pocket, hand it over to Hatch, and say, "I'm ashamed of my superstitious doubts. If you can do so, accept my apology for being a bad host. I'm glad you made it plain I've been an idiot. Go up to the attic if you would like, stay as long as you want and leave when you please. For the rest of this, let's forget it."

On the edge of making all these statements I suddenly noticed that Hatch was staring keenly at my coat where the pocket wrapped the pistol I would that minute have surrendered to him.

A chill new as frost swept through me. Deadly danger was no farther than those fifty inches from where I watched. My five senses got the flavor all at once.

Here was a ghost or a something that lived for ever and whom threats couldn't hurt. Its name was Hatch. It sat immovable, waiting for me to relax my defense.

How firm was my health, how solid were my nerves? Could I protect myself if some demon's prank happened that I never experienced before?

"Carter, you're no coward," I murmured to myself. "Get what information you need to get from this that calls himself Hatch, solve the riddle of this house, and then throw him out or die yourself, defeated."

Facing the attic staircase, my chair was nearer to that door than his. From some remote corner of my mind came an idea that was good because there was none other either worse or better.

"Mr. Hatch, I don't say you're wrong, and I'm not sure I'm right. There are questions about this house that aren't answered. But I have a kind of scientific nature myself. You're a botanist, you say. If Charles Goeste left scientific secrets I'm as willing to see them as you are. I'll take you to the attic if you'll tell me what those secrets are you expect to find."

Hatch stood eagerly. He, the thirty-year visitor, was attic-bound. Meanwhile, while forging up those stairs he figured he could content me with any line of talk. Talk was cheap. Talk would pull the wool over my eyes. I wouldn't be able to follow him, whatever he said. My scientific claims had been made in a blustering tone of voice. Evidently I was a fraud. Hatch's face plainly showed he had no objections to talking to a self-important bluff.

"All right, Mr. Carter," he agreed, "if you'll lead me up those stairs."

"No; you first," I directed politely, and I curled a finger around the trigger of the pocket-heated gun.

"Know anything about plants?" inquired Hatch. I could see that he beat down the temptation to leap to the attic in a wild dash.

"Well—well—that is——" I stammered, giving him further cause to smile at me for a fool.

"Charles Goeste stumbled upon one fact about plants," continued Hatch smoothly. "He found that in five generations of plant life a plant was reproduced exactly in every way. Do you get that? A plant dies, and returns among its own offshoots five generations farther along. It's the same plant."

I GAZED up at Hatch stupidly. A hint of what this was all about was beginning to dawn in me, but it wouldn't do to let Hatch know I followed him closely.

"You're a scientist, are you, Mr. Carter?" Hatch looked leering over his shoulder at me and laughed at my expression. "Well, scientific friend, that was Charles Goeste's secret and I intend to find it among his note-books tonight. He went farther than plants." Hatch chuckled. "Using that fact about plants being reborn in five generations, cell for cell, he tested it upon animals."

At that moment Hatch laughed again, and his laugh echoed stridently up the stair well.

But I didn't laugh. The hair on my neck had started to bristle a second time. Faster I gripped the pistol, for bit by bit the unholy riddle became as clear as ghastly white light.

Charles Goeste had indeed stumbled upon something. In his deftly groping fingers he had seized the secret of the universe. Nobody could ever know any more, either among the living or the dead. The whole and entire truth about life was revealed by a grubby plant—a plant that grew and died and left seeds that grew and died so rapidly that these deaths and births were like a moving picture to Goeste's canny eye. At the end of five generations of reproduction a plant, in the words of Hatch, was *the same identical* plant it had been those five generations back — *it was reincarnation!* Without doubt Goeste made good his astounding knowledge by observing insects that bred swiftly and lived and died in rapid cycles. Then small animals. The law of back-to-earth in five generations was as true as the law of gravity. Everything that lives, from the bacteria to the human being, obeyed this law!

A man returns to the human race in his natural flesh and blood about one hundred and fifty years after he dies. He keeps on returning, for thousands of years, millions of years. I was living when the dinosaur and the saber-toothed tiger roamed the world. So were you. I'll live again until the earth crumbles and dissolves. You will also.

"So science is one of your hobbies, Mr. Carter," bubbled Hatch light-heartedly. He pushed open the attic door and I was close to his heels, trembling in my knees and aching with a fierce tension.

No wonder murder had been committed over Goeste's priceless note-books! Nothing remarkable now about Hatch or others like Hatch coming here ever since Goeste died, rabidly seeking his alleged written records.

If a man knew all that Goeste managed to find out he'd possess Aladdin's lamp of the past, present and future. He might be able to trace his own past lives. He might accumulate all the experience of his earlier existences. What is more important, he might be able to plan in advance what he should do when he lived again. He'd be the only superman ever born.

An upright fellow, with this knowledge at his use, could be an agent for immeasurable good; but if he were vicious he could plan horrible evils.

Where Hatch got the clues he brought with him I didn't yet know; but that he was a powerful and dangerous type to own such clues, I didn't doubt after reading the cunning meaning in his face.

The scrap of document that had led me to this house—its queer text began to take a definite shape and outline.

I couldn't be positive how much of a normal man or what part of a reincarnation Hatch was as each moment increased the risk of my problem. To make him divulge whatever he could was my stubborn intention. How far was it safe to go? Was Hatch's knowledge already so superior that he could outtrick me and my loaded Colt when he finally decided to do that? It was a bleak consolation to know

that in its very grim way time would settle this conundrum.

I still looked dumb and bewildered when Hatch took the drawn diagrams of the house—diagrams brittle and stained—from his coat and consulted them while standing in the middle of the attic. His bird-like features were sharpened abnormally by suspense. Silence in that place and at that time would have been unbearable but for Hatch's noisy breathing.

The under pitch of the roof engaged his attention, and from his pockets he produced a steel jimmy with which he pried out a false partition.

Into his hands fell Goeste's seven note-books, and a number of other odd documents.

Hatch nearly went crazy with delight.

And what I thought was the rotting vibrations of the floor was the rattling of my heels as nervous tremors went through my bones.

There might arrive no better moment than this for slashing those notes out of Hatch's fingers and driving him from the house. He had been of service and now he certainly should be halted before the advantage crept into his palm once and for all.

Impressed as I was at the significance of the things I had heard in his contemptuous voice, I hadn't been aware how paralyzing these things had grown. My hand felt cold and half dead as it drew the pistol from its place.

I never completed that move. For it became apparent that I wasn't looking at Hatch—I was looking at *Goeste*. Only Goeste, born again five generations later, could handle those papers so naturally. Hatch was Goeste!

My teeth were chattering.

The white flare of truth was more ghastly than ever. It was Goeste who had kept his jealous secrets to himself, who murdered his assistant, Luke; Goeste who had plotted schemes for returning to his house and continuing his work when he was born again. Goeste had returned in 1813. Goeste had returned in 1842. And he had beat vainly on this front door in 1875 and 1907.

Charles Goeste, calling himself Hatch, had said to me at this front door half an hour ago, "Interesting place. Do you want to sell it?"

Hatch was his name now for the common and ordinary reason that names change as generations intermingle.

Clearer now was that document in my possession, probably written by no less than Goeste in person. He had left careful instructions to be passed down through the family and its different generations, so that *he* himself would see those instructions and recognize them when he was born again. He would recognize them as having been his own instructions, and he'd go and find those note-books he had cunningly packed away before he died. And yet how would he understand those mystifying instructions and recognize them as having been written by himself?

Bit by bit, the explanation naturally emerged into the light as I pondered it.

Only a scrap of Charles Goeste's instructions had I seen, and that scrap, carelessly treated, had been half destroyed by fire. He must have *left other copies*, more complete, of that document, so that in whatever branch of the family he cropped up again, reborn, there would be one or more of those documents near enough to compel his attention. And he'd read, and recognize. . . .

"Truth lets itself be seen in one flash, and men forget. They name it the night-

mare or a day-dream. If they recognize it as the great secret. . . ."

There was the key, explained more fully in some other family copy of that document, some copy not half burnt or half obliterated; some copy upon which Goeste had at last got his hungry hands. Goeste, getting around under the name of Hatch, had seized the key at last. For in sleep, "They name it the nightmare or a day-dream," and perhaps only once in a lifetime, a man remembers something of his past dead lives. He remembers, wakes and forgets. All of us, I who am writing and you who are reading, remember dreaming perhaps just once of curious events *we never saw in this life.* But Goeste with those precautions would not forget. He had so arranged matters that he *couldn't* forget. He'd be instantly reminded of the musty documents all different members of the family always read and puzzled over. And he'd recognize the absolute link between his dream and particular passages of those mystifying documents. He'd recognize *himself!* The *attic!* To the *attic!* . . .

Every thirty years or so? 1813, 1842, 1875, 1907? What explanation to that?

Another cryptic sentence in the smoke-blackened copy of that immortal document: "As certain as the circulation of the blood and the beat of the pulse, it comes despite birth and death, in its allotted time."

There was the proof of the thirty-year interval and how it worked. It mattered not that a man died early or late, thirty years from the time he last dreamt that magic glimpse of former lives he'd dream of the past again—even though he died and was reborn meanwhile. In thirty years, a little more, a little less, he'd dream again, and it might possibly be in the same lifetime if he lived to a great old age. But to a great old age Goeste never lived. Four successive times he had died remarkably young. Had he hastened his own deaths to speed a course to the Fifth Generation when he would be Charles Goeste fully and completely again? You could only guess at that. Legend said he was always a grim *young man* knocking on this door. Every thirty years, a shade more or less—as often as he dreamed of his past lives and recognized the connection between the dream and the brittle old documents.

Every thirty years, a shade more or less, the dream aroused him to a realization that he was Charles Goeste *or a part of Charles Goeste* with strains of other ancestors in him, and he'd be drawn to this house as to a magnet—drawn here just "as certain as the circulation of the blood." It was a clockwork cycle which made one important blood corpuscle travel thirty years through all the cell-structure of the body, transmuted from father to son, before it reached the brain once more and caused the strange flashing dream again—a dream that was just a glimpse; it never stayed long. And for all his documents even Goeste couldn't keep his hold on that dream more than a brief while. For a short vivid space of time he'd remember the dream, recognize the documents, and understand what was waiting for him in the attic. He would storm at this door, fail, and then lose his grip on the past and forget.

Or perhaps it had not been Goeste at all! Perhaps it was but an atavistic memory. Goeste's great discovery may have so impressed him with its world-shaking significance, that it was imprinted upon the germ-plasm and transmitted to his descendants, one of whom in each generation gained a flash of this inherited memory and came storming into Goeste Hall—in 1813, in 1842, in 1875, and in 1907.

But the thirty-year impulse which had aroused him yesterday was the time of highest opportunity, because, whatever his name now, he was soul and body the Charles Goeste he had been one hundred and fifty years ago. The canny Charles Goeste of 1783. For this was the Fifth Generation!

So I patterned and pieced it to myself as anybody would have done with the facts spilling like water through a broken dam.

HATCH, in my mind Goeste, pawed over his papers. I watched him. Queer cries of satisfaction, of a whining kind more animal than human, escaped his throat.

There were no lights in the attic. The setting sun was slanting almost horizontally through a dormer window. Hatch had resourcefully taken a Colonial beveled mirror off the wall and stood it on a table so that its reflected red sunlight lit up the documents he devoured.

Strange words filed across the Goeste-written manuscripts. Unearthly pictures and unconventional designs. I bent over them myself and for a while—I lost track of how long—forgot the pistol in my pocket as I thumbed those dusty heaps of evidence with both hands.

Gone was my caution and any recollection of the peril I was in.

A steel-engraved portrait turned up in that bundle of stuff, a nearly camera-fine drawing of a man labeled "Charles Goeste." By that time either Hatch's teeth or my own were chattering like knives. Hatch's supreme intake of breath might have fallen on my ear. It might have been a sidelong sight of his raising arms in the mirror that saved me in that sunset hour. I'm not sure. But he was inches from my throat when in a frenzy of action I drove him to the floor with a whipping left fist that split his ear at the base of his brain and knocked him senseless.

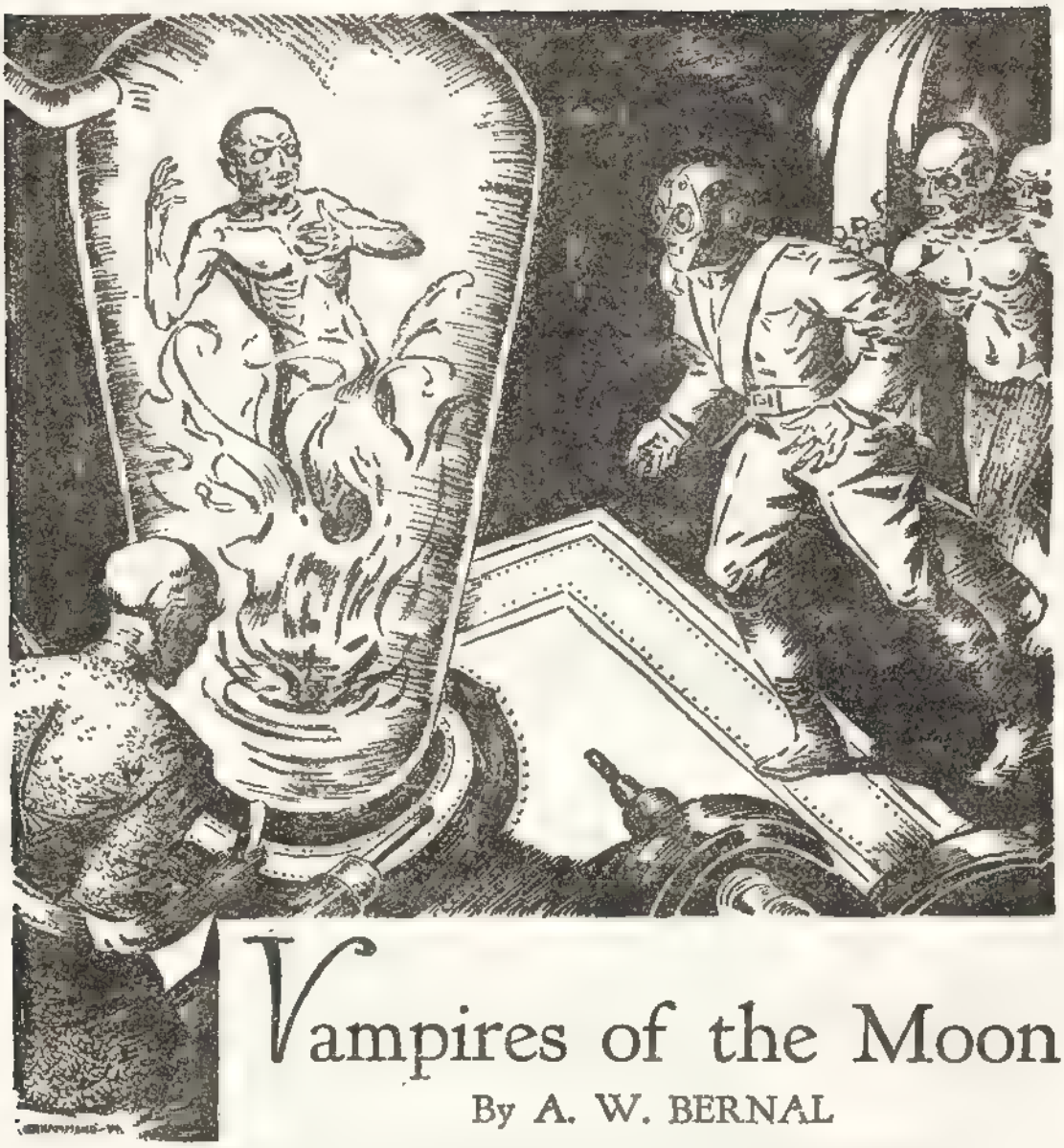
Yet I ignored him and with eyes that must have been red as fire stared at the portrait.

There was no sound, and yet thunder seemed to roll through the attic. For here was revelation and there was no mistake about it. What I saw in the mirror and what I saw in the portrait matched as one.

I was Charles Goeste!

Old memories and shadows stirred in my burning consciousness. I was Charles Goeste, and all I had once learned was as new worlds to me. At my feet lay Luke, the crafty assistant who had vainly sought that hidden partition and its note-books when I prepared them both, and who had to pillage the copies of my instructions from different generations of the family —Luke, who had killed me those one hundred and fifty years ago to intercept my secrets.

"In fascination the Earthman stared."



Vampires of the Moon

By A. W. BERNAL

A sensational story of the Masters of the Moon and their mindless slaves—and a terrible threat against the inhabitants of Earth

The Story Thus Far

WHEN Captain Richard Starr of the Trans-spatial Service Legion, stationed at Moon Headquarters, instructed his younger brother, Lieutenant John Starr, to go search for two missing Legion space-ships—the *Thunderbolt* and the *America VII*—he did not imagine what horrific events loomed just ahead.

Jack Starr, with his friends Lieutenant Hal Bradley and Rusty Steele, took the *Meteor IV* and, by chance, strayed down a chain of vast caverns in the pitted face of the moon where they stumbled upon a gigantic stone staircase evidently hewn ages ago by intelligent beings. The staircase apparently led to the satellite's interior. Upon following this strange path-

This story began in WEIRD TALES for May.

way, the trio from Earth discovered the Moon City situated in a cave lighted by a carpet of phosphorescent plant-growth. Tests showed that there was breathable air in this inner-world of the moon.

After unexplainable occurrences, during which all his comrades apparently went insane and Jack Starr smashed the ship's radio against his will, Steele was hit on the head with a heavy wrench wielded by the younger Starr. Steele awoke to find himself a captive in the Moon City with no knowledge of the whereabouts of his comrades or the spaceship *Meteor IV*.

By means of a helmet of his own devising, Steele was able to converse with his captors by thought-transference. When the Earthman asked questions, his jailer—a living mummy—simply commanded him to follow and led the way to the audience chamber of the Ten, the ruling council of the mummy-men.

On the way, Steele met his friend Jack Starr, who was working with a group of the half-alive moon-men. Jack ignored the greeting of his fellow Legionnaire and, acting as though in a dream, struck down the bewildered Steele. Ere the latter could find a reason for the attack, his captors had pushed him down a corridor and halted before a massive door.

Beyond this great portal Steele was to meet the all-powerful Ten and find a solution to the uncanny situation in which he found himself. The Earthman squared his shoulders and marched forward into the audience chamber.

Meanwhile Captain Richard Starr, after having received an ominously incoherent radio message, had understood that his brother's life was somehow in danger. With as much speed as possible he commandeered the only usable ship on the moon at the time, a decrepit ore-carrier, and was off to the rescue. Accompanying him was Lieutenant Jerry Smith, eager for an encounter with the monstrosities of the Moon City.

In an endeavor to speed up the ore-carrier, Captain Starr dropped the ancient ship through the unfathomable blackness of a huge pit in the moon's interior. Before he realized it, the rocky bottom of the shaft loomed close beneath and Starr frantically jabbed at the control-studs screaming: *"Look out! We're going to crash!"*

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7. *Down the Tunnel Alone*

With a splintering, rending shock the hurtling ore-car crashed upon the outcropping of rock in the shaft of the giant staircase. Amid the smashing of ports and the straining of metal, one whole side was completely shorn off the improvised battleship, spilling its stunned occupants down the steep, jagged side of the shaft. The remainder of the ore-car slid on down to the foot of the great stone staircase, to become a tangled mass of wreckage.

The bodies of Captain Richard Starr and Lieutenant Jerry Smith lay still upon a sort of platform near the bottom of the shaft. The slowly settling dust of centuries, that had been stirred up by the smash-up, sifted down upon the motionless forms in a thin, soft blanket. It was lucky that the pair had been thrown out of the ore-car at its first shock, for had they gone on down with it, their bodies would have become an unrecognizable pulp.

It was some time later when Jerry Smith awoke to consciousness with a groan. Dizzily he sat up. His first thoughts were of his right arm, which hung limply at his side; he tried to move it but could not.

"Broken," he muttered painfully, and

the whispered word echoed eerily back to him.

He sat awhile without getting up, trying to collect his thoughts. Finally, after a fit of sneezing, brought on by a swirl of dust, the T. S. L. man staggered unsteadily to his feet. The flying dust caused a cut on his cheek to smart. He glanced at his wrist chronometer to see how long he had lain unconscious, but found it smashed. Straining his eyes in the semi-darkness of the shaft, he looked about him.

Up to this time, no thought of his comrade had entered his mind; he seemed to have forgotten about him. But now his eyes fell upon the motionless form of Captain Starr, and with a few lurching steps the younger man was at the officer's side. For a long time Smith worked feverishly with his one good arm in an effort to resuscitate his superior. At last he desisted in his futile attempts to revive the captain.

Lieutenant Smith lay back, panting from his exertion. He remembered the first-aid kit that he had thrown in the ore-car at the last moment before the trip. As soon as he could catch his breath, he hurried down the great stone staircase in rapid leaps toward the wreckage at the bottom.

He found the kit without much trouble and, since it seemed to be in good condition, fastened it to his weapon-belt. Turning away from the smashed ore-car his eyes fell on the car's water tank. The container had split open at one end but it was still nearly half full. Since the tank was not large, and had less weight on account of the lesser gravity of the moon, it was without real effort that he managed to lug it up the steps after him.

As rapidly as he could with his uninjured arm, Smith bathed and bandaged Starr's wounds. It was rather a difficult job, for most of the gashes were on the head and face, with a particularly long one cutting a rough semicircle above the left ear. But Smith no longer feared for the other's life, for he had noted the unconscious man to be breathing easily now.

After cleansing and bandaging his own wounds, he lay down to rest. He had done all he knew how to do to revive Starr; all he could do now was wait.

IT WAS some four hours later by Starr's chronometer — which had luckily escaped all damage except for a broken crystal—that the unconscious man opened his eyes.

He was rather weak and unsteady on his feet for awhile, due to his loss of blood, for his wounds had bled profusely. But before twenty-four hours had elapsed he was almost as good as well, even to the extent of helping Smith with the work of establishing some sort of a camp.

Starr was consumed with worry because the ore-car was disabled beyond all possible chance of repair. There were still many miles to be covered before their goal, the Moon City, was reached. Besides, of what use could they be to Jack now? He had only his hand weapons with which to fight, and as a combatant, Smith was certainly out. A man can't do battle when he has a broken arm and a crippled knee. And supposing they did rescue Jack, what then? How could they escape? To traverse all the miles between the inner world and the surface on foot was hopeless.

"I say, sir," remarked Jerry Smith, breaking in on the other's musings, "have you figured out a way to get out of here; whether it's to go back to the Station, or on to the Moon City?"

"No, I haven't," responded Starr slowly. He opened a tin of concentrated food biscuits and offered them to Smith before continuing. "But whatever we do will

have to be done without delay. You know we have less than three weeks in which to see Jack alive. If it takes us longer than that to get to the Moon City, we shall be too late to save him.

"Even though we must proceed on foot and rely upon finding a ship at the Moon City to escape with, I'm for going on. There is no sense in waiting here, and we can not go back to the Station. What could we use for protection against lack of oxygen? We could never breathe the air at the surface, could we?"

"No," Smith nodded, "we couldn't. I guess the only thing for you to do is to push on alone."

Starr gave his junior officer an incredulous look.

"I mean my leg, sir. I could not hope to make it to the Moon City on foot; not over such ground as that which lies ahead. But don't let that stop you, sir," Smith added quickly, as Starr's shoulders began to sink dejectedly.

"Why, I could not leave you here, Smith."

"Surely, sir. Why not? The boys will be down here after us in a week as soon as they open that letter you left them. I know that you won't rest until you are at Jack's side, sir. And if you can, you might steal a ship from the moon-men and get back to the shaft within a couple of days. At any rate, whether you get back in a week's time or not, we'll all be saved. That Petrovsky super-ship you radioed for must be well on her way to the moon by this time, and when the bunch read your letter telling where we are, they'll lose no time in shooting down the shaft after us. They can't fail to see this camp and pick me up. And it will help a lot to have you already at the Moon City, sir. Or at least, near it. You can be sizing up the situation and dope out a plan of action while you're waiting for us to arrive. Don't you——"

"I'll do it!" exclaimed Starr suddenly. "That's a good idea."

Having made his decision, Captain Starr tarried only long enough to make up a packet of provisions, which consisted, for the most part, of water, then bade Lieutenant Smith good-bye, and set out upon his long journey.

THE way was difficult, since the floor of the great dark tunnel was extremely ragged and uneven. Starr, who was forced to go slowly because of his weakness from loss of blood, continually was forced to climb up and down over miniature mountains. Even aided as he was by the moon's lesser gravity, the Legion man made very little forward progress. It was like hiking over the gigantic peaked waves of a frozen ocean, and it seemed hours to the adventurer before he even got out of sight of Smith's little camp.

For long he trudged down the gloomy horizontal tunnel that had its origin at the foot of the great stone staircase. He was thankful that there was only the single passage to the cave of the Moon City, because it would have been only too easy to become lost through a side opening.

At first the Earthman had been awed at the magnificent rock formations he could but dimly discern in the half-light. Each new twist in the tunnel, and there were many, disclosed new vistas of wonder. But when Starr had marched on until his legs seemed dead and each step was torture, he had eyes only for the boulder-strewn ground ahead in order that he might seek out the easiest path.

Finally he could go no farther; he was dog-tired. The end of the tunnel was still out of sight and the Earthman could not guess how many more miles he had yet to travel. It seemed ages since he had

rest, and Starr decided that he could go no farther until he had some.

No sooner had he laid his weary body down upon the stony ground than he was fast asleep. For much longer than he would have desired, Starr lay in a dreamless slumber, his tired body recuperating from the merciless march he had forced himself through. The precious time he thought to have gained by his long tramp was more than lost by the period of heavy stupor in which he lay.

A blinding glare of light was what brought Captain Starr out of his deep sleep. The beam poured its white radiance in confusing intensity upon the startled Earthman. Utterly bewildered, Starr rolled over and tried to make out the cause of the fearful brilliance.

His light-blinded eyes could barely distinguish a huge, dark something behind the searchlight's source, but what he did make out brought him to his feet in a chill of horror. In sheer terror, he shot a dazzled look about him for a hiding-place. It was useless; he could not see even a small crevice.

That dim shape behind the searchlight was the blue-black hull of the *Meteor IV!*

Coming from the cave of light and heading for the surface, the dark-metaled, silent space-cruiser had rounded a bend in the tunnel and sent her guide-beam shooting straight at the sleeping Earthman. Bathed in the light of the guide-beam, the white and scarlet Earthman was perfectly visible to whoever was in the control room.

The *Meteor IV* was rapidly slowing to a stop. The door in the conning-tower clanged open. Starr, white-faced, clutched the butt of one of the pistols in his weapon-belt.

"The moon-men," he choked. "It is the moon-men! They are going to get me!" And he stood, blinded by the glare of the guide-beams, with not even the tiniest crevice in the rock wall within reach to hide in.

8. *Audience with the Ten*

STEELE paced with military stiffness into the council room of the moon-men. To his astonishment, he saw, as he faced a wide dais at the end of the long room, that he was entirely alone. The room seemed empty; he was its only occupant.

Directly above the low platform, the Earthman saw a huge oval whose center was a gleaming, silver-flecked, azure field. The blue seemed to be rather a haze in the gold frame which surrounded it, than a solid substance. As the Earthman stood watching it, the cloud of delicate-hued blue and silver seemed to quiver and vibrate as does a film of soap-bubble in a gentle breeze.

Fascinated, Steele gaped in wonderment, rooted to the spot. Idly, his fingers strayed to the control-box of his thought-helmet and unthinkingly he twirled the dial thereon. Suddenly he was startled nearly out of his wits when, in the course of his tuning, a thought flashed into his mind with the abruptness and shock of a shouted word. Steele's mouth dropped open in amazement; then he winced as the words again formed in his brain. The force with which the words impinged on his mind was not alone the cause of Steele's astonishment; it was, in part, the sentence itself:

"Are you Samuel Haddon Steele?"

It seemed to echo in his brain over and over. Then he realized what was happening and as quickly as he could marshal his thoughts Steele replied.

"Yes. That is my name. Who and where are you?"

Clearly, almost too strongly, came the answer.

"This is the voice of the Ten. We are in our sending-chambers, which are scattered throughout the buildings of the Inner City. Our combined thought-impulses are coming to you there in the Council Hall from the Mouthpiece. You are looking at the Mouthpiece now; it is that gold-encircled oval of vibrations above the dais."

Steele, staring fascinatedly at the shimmering Mouthpiece, sent this sentence:

"What do you want with me and my comrades? Wh——"

Like a dash of icy water, the hostile, supercilious response of the Ten filled the Earthman's mind.

"Silence! It is not for you to ask aught of us. The captive does not question the captor, it is the other way about. But you will learn much about us presently, for it suits our purpose that you do so. But first, are you and the fellow Bradley and the one Starr the only members of your crew who know how to guide your ships?"

The surprized and puzzled Earthman answered in the positive. The crew of a Legion cruiser is not supposed to know much about the complicated method of button-control of the space-ship.

There followed a short pause during which the vibration of the Mouthpiece became almost nil, and the quivering, sensitive field of silver-splashed blue became a smooth, quiet surface. Then the gold oval again coruscated with the rapid color-vibrations of the Mouthpiece as the Ten thought-spoke to the awed Earthman.

"Listen well, Outsider," came the clear-cut, cold voice in Steele's brain. "Listen well to what we are about to tell you, as did your comrades. We are on the verge of a great project and we have need of you Outsiders; so listen to our history and think well of our vast determination and greater power. Listen, and do not ask questions, for we shall tell you all that we wish you to know and nothing more."

Then as Steele sat motionless, watching the Mouthpiece, there unfolded inside his brain the story of the moon-men. For he knew not how long a time he sat in rapt receptive mood, hearing mentally the amazing tale of the vanished surface-people, the Haxomelians.

THOUSANDS of years before life, in the sense that it is known today, appeared on Earth, the Haxomelians—or surface-people—dwelt in wonderful cities on the face of the moon. Being more inclined to other more abstract phases of science, the Haxomelian scientists made very few attempts to bridge the gulf between their world and the mother planet, except by means of super-powered telescopes.

Thus it was that even had they had time to prepare for such a trip, the Haxomelians would probably never have thought of Earth as a refuge from the Great Catastrophe. But they had not the time, for the Great Catastrophe came with overpowering swiftness.

The Great Catastrophe was that most fearful, soul-warping cataclysm when the entire face of the moon seemed suddenly to become infected with monstrous volcanoes which spewed boiling rock and liquid metals down upon the defenseless people, in their crowded moon metropolises. The satellite writhed like a living thing under the hideous cosmic plague.

Virtually the whole surface of the disrupting planet changed almost overnight from lush, life-filled valleys and hive-like, peaceful cities into a nightmare of ghastly sores — huge fiery cauldrons of foaming, seething death; jagged monstrosities stretching up into the high reaches of the sullen, murky atmosphere;

poisoned blisters that bubbled and burst, loosing a billowing inferno of flaming gases upon the doomed Haxomelians.

When at last the awful transformation had been wrought and the reeling world grew steady once again, the sun shone down upon a seared and airless rotten shell of a devastated world. The little planet's upper crust was utterly barren of any form of life.

But the Haxomelians were not totally destroyed.

When gigantic cracks swallowed up cities, meadows and oceans like the ravenous mouths of Titans, the great fissures also sucked down the moon's atmosphere in vast gulps, sealing it in huge chambers far down in the bowels of the planet. And these mighty, hideously mocking wounds of the anguishing world yawned and swallowed up a whole metropolis, transporting it, undemolished, far into the moon's interior, then cracked shut in an ugly scar while the world rocked under the agony of the shock.

The Haxomelians were brave. The remnant of them yet alive in the dark, sealed tomb miles below the planet's crust did not give up, but fought valiantly to keep the flame of life kindled.

Although the layer of their prison was a red-hot oven of lava-beds, the Haxomelians sensed a stratum of cooler caverns farther down. A continual rush of air tore screaming up from bottomless cracks in the floor of the black tomb. The tenacious Haxomelians resolved to save themselves from a sweltering, hideous death by forcing a path down through the still rumbling maw of the moon. So down into an abysmal rift the Haxomelians began their exodus.

It soon became apparent that although there were great stretches of inhabitable, lake-filled chambers farther down inside the inner world, there were many miles of blistering ground to be traversed ere these havens of the interior could be reached. A stratum of witheringly hot ground lay like an impassable barrier barring the way of the courageous survivors of the fearsome holocaust. The great problem was now how to get across the searing band of volcano-beds into the inner world.

For all survivors to hew their way would be utter folly because, although the Haxomelians had solved the secret of perpetual life, they were not at all immune from pain. But the necessity for immediate action soon caused a plan to be formulated.

For centuries the Haxomelians had used thought-transference to converse with, and now they went a step further. A party of the Haxomelians united their thoughts and assumed control over a body of the survivors who volunteered their services; they usurped the very minds of the others, borrowed their bodies!

The Haxomelians relinquishing their personalities to the directive powers of the Xinthquuls, or Controllers, then became merely efficient, unfeeling cogs of a great machine. As long as their own minds were banished from their bodies, the Yultats, or Workers, could feel no pain; they were as inanimate machines.

So it was that a mass of temporarily mindless Yultats worked superhumanly in blistering temperatures, forcing a way down to the cool inner world. The Xinthquuls, seeing through the eyes of the sweating Yultats, quickly found a path of least resistance to the caves of the phosphorescent growths.

When the Xinthquuls were ready for a hurried dash along the trail cleared by the slaving Yultats, they knew that before them lay a comparatively short, direct route to the moon's center, with even a

mighty spiralling staircase to help them at one stage of their journey.

And now it became the duty of the Yultats to reverse positions with the Xinthquuls: to become Controllers instead of Workers, in order that the Haxomelians at the world's crust could follow painlessly along the steaming, life-withering inferno between the two parties of refugees.

But those at the inner world, crafty, envious planners that they were, evolved a terrible scheme. They took over the wills of their fellows at the upper world, and after they had brought them, unscathed, down to the cave of light, *kept them mentally enslaved!*

The precious supply of the life-giving compound was limited now, since it was made from a plant that did not grow at the inner world; so the cruel, mind-vampiring Xinthquuls hoarded the supply of the chemical, using it sparingly on their own bodies, but giving none to their hapless slaves. Consequently, the lifeless shells of the Yultats withered through the centuries into mere hideous, mummified entities, while the mind-sucking Controllers not only chemically supplied themselves with the bloom of youth, but also conserved their bodily energies by allowing the mindless Yultats to perform for them even the tiniest deed requiring physical action.

Thus it was that the Xinthquuls—of which the Ten were chosen representatives—had lived in the cave of light for thousands of years, spending their time in dreaming and thinking, while their strange city was kept going by a hoard of mindless, mummified husks of what had once been men and women.

9. *Berserk*

"AND now," the icy voice of the Ten still poured itself into Steele's eager brain, "we come to the present, and to our great project we are about to undertake.

"We have decided to migrate to your planet and make it our home, using your peoples for fresh, strong Yultats!"

Steele could not think. His mind swirled on the border of black chaos. The Ten continued without pause, as though their last words were simple, commonplace information.

"The reason we are going to take over your Earth is because we Xinthquuls desire to increase our race. Since we have been hidden away here in these depths of our planet, there has never been a child born to us that ever reached maturity. Without exception, the infants died long ere they could speak. For, banished from the light of the sun as we are, that primal source of life and health has never given up to us its powerful, vital rays of strength.

"Believing as we did, that the way to the upper crust of our world was sealed for ever, and knowing that were it open to us, the way would be airless, we despaired of ever getting the sun's warm, invisible rays of life to our offspring to keep them healthy and bring them safely to maturity.

"But when the first band of Outsiders stumbled into this cave of light, we saw our chance. After assuming mental control of these beings we learned of your huge, sun-bathed sphere, where long basking in the sun's healthful rays was a common thing, and determined at once to get your peoples out of the way and utilize this warm world for ourselves.

"A new race of Yultats, too, will be most welcome, as these we now use are about worn out."

Steele could not even protest against this horrible plan of the fiendish Xinthquuls; the calm, unemphasized manner in which the Ten thought-spoke of the ghastly conquest, as though they were

dealing with some sort of unintelligent insect-life, left the Earthman stunned.

"And now, here is where you enter into our plans," the Ten still pursued the topic so terrifying to Steele. "Our present Yultats—the swarms of Earth will make excellent ones, and we shall breed them for just that purpose—are busily engaged in turning out a fleet of space-ships similar to the ones you use and equipped with the same kind of weapons, only vastly improved. We have accurately copied each detail of your ships and are therefore confident of our cruisers.

"But that is where the difficulty lies. We have been told that it takes many long years to train men to fly your Legion ships properly. We, besides being ignorant of mechanical things, are utterly foreign to the method of control you use in your ships. Consequently, although we can steer the space-ships ourselves, it would be extremely difficult for one of us to put a cruiser through war maneuvers at rapid speed. That is where you can aid us."

Steele, weak and trembling, rose to his feet, shaking his fist at the Mouthpiece. "Never! Never will I help you!"

"Silence, idiot!" thundered the thoughts of the Ten inside the horror-stricken Earthman's head. "Do not give us an answer yet. Think well. We can make excellent use of your comrades, Bradley and Starr, also, but you, who are the only one of your race that can even resist our thoughts and escape being mentally enslaved, we need particularly. In a short time, by a method known to us, you will become very efficient in guiding space-ships through commanding Yultats from a sending-chamber.

"Yet understand us. Should you refuse, it will not be long before we can acquire a fairly proficient method of controlling our ships, ourselves. No matter what your decision is, we shall eventually succeed in conquering your world; for, although one of your friends seems to have gotten a message through to your chief, your minions will not have time to prepare fully to resist us by the time we are ready, even should you refuse our request. Remember, *we can not fail!*"

Steele's eyes blazed defiantly. He snarled half aloud:

"You can enslave me, body and soul, until the end of time, but never will I accede to your request, and neither will any other Earthman."

"Wait! Remember that whether you help us or not, your world is doomed. Your helping us will only speed up matters a little, and for this small saving of time—for we are impatient now, having waited for this opportunity for thousands of years—we shall reward you very richly. For your services, we offer you eternal life, the rank of a Xinthquul, and a portion of the Earth for you to have for your own!"

STEELE knew in his heart that every word the Xinthquuls had said was true. Whether he decided to throw in his lot with them or not, he felt that the ghoulish mind-vampires could not fail in their hideous plan of conquest.

Then mockingly came the cold voice of the Ten once more.

"Should you refuse," it said, "you will be subjected to an operation that will transform you for eternity into a mindless Yultat. Now we shall send you to where Starr and Bradley are thinking over this same proposal. Think well and decide wisely. We shall call for your answer in an hour. Remember, *we can not fail!* Go. That is all."

Steele twirled the control-dial of his thought-helmet so that he could receive no thought-commands from the Ten. If

only he could get his hands on those inhuman monsters, he'd ruin their ghastly plan of conquest! Seething with rage, the Earthman shook his clenched fists at the Mouthpiece.

And then he went mad.

"If there is a God in heaven, may he blast your hideous souls!" he shrieked, and rushed toward the dais above which was the oval of gold.

He was berserk, desiring only to wreak havoc on anything that had to do with the fiendish monsters of the moon. Insanely, he strove to mount the broad steps of the dais to smash the Mouthpiece; it seemed to him to be a symbol of the Xinthquuls that, if smashed, would destroy at least some of their power.

As if by magic, as the Earthman dashed across the metal floor of the huge Council Hall, there sprang from a hundred concealed openings a horde of the living-dead slaves — the Yultats. The room echoed with the clatter of metal feet on metal floors as the half-alive creatures swarmed over the dais to cut off the berserk Earthman from the Mouthpiece.

Before he had even reached the foot of the dais, a solid mass of Yultats barred his way. Yet he did not stop. With a mighty leap, to which the moon's lesser gravitational pull added tremendous power, Steele lunged into the midst of the guardians of the Mouthpiece.

Fighting with the strength of a maniac, he punched, bit, kicked and yelled as he went down with the surging Yultats on top of him. He cared not for the imminence of a terrible death, so long as he died in the act of rending asunder and destroying the age-old slaves of the Xinthquuls.

He did not know it, but the Yultats were also without any form of weapon. Until the Earthmen had brought them, weapons were unheard of in the underground city of the moon. They stopped Steele's frenzied onslaught by sheer weight of numbers. Vainly struggling, he was soon pinned to the floor by a score of the Yultats.

Even so, the Earthman fought to wriggle free, and so fierce were his struggles that he finally shook off his attackers and wrenched himself loose.

Wildly, he flailed about with his arms, scattering the mummy-men like leaves in a storm. Jerking one of them off his feet, Steele swung him around like a club.

He soon realized that it was a hopeless task for him to try to keep up his smashing tactics for ever; so, turning swiftly on his heel, he hurled the Yultat he had been using as a human club soaring through the air straight toward the gold oval of the Mouthpiece.

In the brief glimpse he had of the results of his act, before he was deluged under squirming, tugging Yultats, Steele saw the flying body of the mummy-man strike the oval of vibrations in a direct hit. There was a brief sizzling crackle, a puff of acrid smoke; then the ashes of the Yultat sifted free of the apparently unharmed film of silver-splashed blue vibrations.

Then he saw no more for awhile, for he was picked bodily up from the floor by twenty pairs of bony hands, and lugged helplessly off toward the exit from the Council Hall.

Just before he was carried through the opening, however, he managed to squirm enough to get a momentary look at the late scene of battle. There was no sign of blood whatever, except for a few tiny splotches which had come from his own scratched and clawed body. There were many heads, torsos, and limbs of the Yultats scattered about over the dais, Steele noted with some satisfaction. There were

even three or four legless or armless individuals staggering erratically away from the dais, evidently feeling no pain.

He did not know whither he was being borne, nor did he care. His tired, aching body was being lulled into a sort of numbed indifference as to its surroundings. In the stuporous state in which he now felt himself sinking, the over-tired Earthman cared little what was happening. He closed his weary eyes and tried hard to forget everything and just rest easily as he was carried to his unknown destination.

10. The Earthmen Decide

WHEN Steele opened his eyes again, he found himself confronted by the welcome forms of Lieutenants Starr and Bradley.

"Well, old robot," smiled Starr, helping Steele to his feet, "how do you feel after your little beauty nap?"

"Jupiter, but I feel stiff and sore!" yawned Steele.

"Your interview with the Ten must have been more soothing than ours. We didn't feel much like sleeping afterward." This from Bradley.

"The Ten!" Steele's smile had vanished with the rapidity of light; he was wide awake now. "The Ten! Did they tell you what they're going to do? We have to choose between aiding those ghouls, or becoming like those foul monstrosities, the Yultats!

"Jack! Brad!" he clutched at their arms in terror. "The Earth—doomed—don't you——"

Starr put a consoling arm around the white-faced Steele.

"Listen, Rusty, old man," he soothed. "We still have a chance. Come on, old chap, buck up!"

"But, Jack," choked the other, raising his hopeless eyes to the younger, blonder counterpart of Captain Richard Starr, "Jack, I . . . I don't want to choose . . . it isn't fair! Oh, why don't they kill us and get it over with?"

"Rusty Steele, are you a *coward?*" ground out Jack Starr. "Aren't we going to stop them? Aren't we going to wipe out this nest of rotten mind-vampires? Brad and I are. Snap out of it! If you've got any courage at all, you'll help us fight!"

The thrust had its desired effect. Steele, white as chalk, leapt to his feet.

"I'm not a coward!" he shouted. "I'll fight! We'll all fight! And we'll lick those devils, too!"

Bradley and Starr drew deep sighs of relief, then grinned at their comrade whose mood had so suddenly changed.

"That's the way to talk, Rusty. I thought you'd get a grip on yourself," Starr said, hugging Steele tightly. "We felt beaten, too, after we first heard the Xinthquuls tell us of their terrible plans. But we decided that if we fought them like the soldiers our Earth supposes us to be, we might find some way to outwit those demons. Get the idea?"

"You bet!" Steele was glowing with enthusiasm. "We'll beat this scum of the moon yet. We've got to. We're the Earth's only hope."

Thereupon, the trio entered into a discussion of all possible methods of escape. They understood perfectly that in the short time allotted them, they must devise some means of getting at least one of their party back to the Station to give warning of the mind-stealers' horrible plan of conquest.

"But it won't be easy to get away from these crafty devils," remarked Starr, at one point in the discussion. "You've got a big advantage over us, Rusty, in that thought-helmet of yours. It looks like you're our chief bet. Those vampires

can't get you to do whatever they want you to, as they can us. Tell him what happened to you, Brad."

"Well," said Bradley, "it occurred when they were leading me to the Council Hall. We were going down a long, straight corridor that was deserted, except for me and my three guides, and I thought I saw a chance to escape. I knew we were on the second floor, because I had just glanced out a window as we passed it; and I figured that I could hop out and fall two stories in this light gravity without hurting myself.

"So I hauled off and banged two of my guards into the wall as hard as I could, and kicked the other one hard enough to send him sprawling on his face; then I scooted back down the hallway toward the window, prepared to dive out of it before they caught me.

"Well, I hadn't sprinted more than five paces before I found myself slowing down to a walk. I tried to lift my knees up, but they just wouldn't go. Then I tried to stop and find out what was up, but it was no go. I seemed to be sitting on somebody's head, watching his legs go without being able to control his steps. Soon I found myself turning around and hiking back to the Yultats. And blamed if I didn't stoop and help 'em get to their feet, all against my will! Well, after that, I gave up and stepped right along with the boys, quiet as could be. I saw right there that it was no use to do any hesitating."

"YES," laughed Starr, when the other had finished, "and that reminds me of something I'd better tell you about, Rusty, old robot. If the moon-men toss a little vial of brilliant green gas at you, hold your breath. When we tried to make a break just after we got out of the Council Hall, they sprang that one on us.

"We decided to fool the Xinthquuls by concentrating hard on not giving in to their wills, and bashed in the heads of our guides with our fists" — he held up a bruised and swollen hand — "so *they* couldn't receive any thought-impulses. Then, thinking hard all the while so the Xinthquuls couldn't take control, we darted down the passageway. It worked splendidly until a single Yultat appeared at the far end of the corridor and tossed a little capsule of green stuff at us.

"The thing burst just ahead of us, and immediately a cloud of brilliant vapor swirled all around us in a billowing gust. We took one whiff on our way through it, then dropped like logs to the metal floor. It was a gas of suspended animation!

"We lay there, vividly sensing everything that went on, but without the power of moving a muscle. When the Yultats from some other part of the building came and picked us up, I could see my chest, and it was positively not moving up and down as it would have been had I been breathing. The Yultats packed us to this little cell like sacks of meal. I could feel my arms and legs dragging and dangling like the limbs of a doll, without being able to even give so much as a feeble twitch with them. But it soon wore off once we got here, and so we were fully able to control our movements long before you arrived on the scene. In fact, the Xinthquuls made me do a bit of work for them after I had recovered from the effects of the green gas. I had to clear out this room for us, and I guess it was while I was under control at that time that I met you in the hall and slammed you on the ear. However, I didn't know I had ever seen you until you told me about it. I want you to accept my apologies——"

But Steele interrupted him, to urge a

continuance of the discussion of plans for escape. In the limited space of time the Earthmen had to evolve a plan, it was hard to find one that might work.

Finally the trio decided upon a ruse that, while the chance of escape it offered was extremely slim, gave them a slight hope. At any rate, it was the best they could think of in the short time left before the Yultats would come knocking at the door.

THE unlocking of their cell door brought the conversation to an abrupt termination.

"Remember, Rusty," whispered Starr to Steele, hoping that the Ten were not tuning in on their conversation, "remember, the fate of the whole world rests with you. They can steal our minds from us, turning us against our friends, as when they made me hit you when you accosted me in the hall, but they can't steal yours. Rusty, old robot, don't let them get mental control of you, whatever you do. Keep your fingers on your thought-helmet control-dial, and if you feel any suggestions coming in that you don't want to receive, why, just tune them out immediately. And now, good-bye, and good luck."

"Good-bye, Rusty," called Bradley, as the cell door closed behind Steele, and then a Yultat guided the Earthman back to the Council Hall.

Steele went alone because it was part of the trio's plan that he should do so. If all three of the T. S. L. men should appear to agree with the Ten's idea of Earth conquest, tangible results would be expected too soon to fit in with the Earthmen's ruse. If one should throw in his lot with the Xinthquuls, he could stall for time by begging time to persuade the others to do likewise. This, at any rate, was Steele's intention.

"Say, Oscar, old corpse," said Steele aloud, jokingly, to his stiffly pacing guide, "why don't we call a sky-taxi? Or haven't you got any conveyances in this dump? I haven't seen one anywhere."

"What need is there here for a conveyance?" replied the Yultat, to Steele's surprize, for he had expected no response. "A Xinthquul has no desire and no need to stir from his cushioned chambers. The less he uses his body, the more youthful it will remain. And until we get established on Earth and are able to manufacture or grow more of our powder of life, we must be conserving of our present supply.

"As for Yultats, who cares how much they must walk to do our bidding? Why build machines for other machines to ride in?"

Steele shivered as he thought of the queer double personality of the Yultats. Yet it was not really a dual personality affair, he told himself. The personality—the thoughts, the impulses that controlled the Yultat's actions—was that of the controlling Xinthquul; the Yultat merely received the instructions sent to him via thought-waves, translating and transforming them until they suited his body.

Further musings were cut off by the approach of the two to the beautifully decorated door of the Council Hall. Soon the Earthman was again facing the Mouthpiece, from whose dais all traces of battle had been effaced, waiting for recognition from the Ten.

Although he had set his control-dial so that he might receive the thought impulses of the Ten, he still kept his fingers on it so that he could instantly tune them out. He had not long to wait before the voice of the Ten came throbbing through his head:

"Have you reached a decision, Outsider? Why are you alone?"

Steele recited his piece:

"I have reached my decision. My friends can not quite make up their minds. I have decided to help you in your conquest of my planet, if you promise to give me eternal life, and a portion of the Earth for my own, on completion of your plans."

"You have chosen wisely, Outsider," pulsed the clear bell-tones of the Ten deep inside Steele's brain. "You will not regret your choice. We have an old saying in our world that runs, 'He who would be wise listens not to the tongue of his emotions, but to the tongue of his mind.' That is what you have done, Outsider. But you are an Outsider no longer; we do now already consider you as a fellow Xinthquul and our equal. To complete your appropriation of a Xinthquul identity, you shall no longer be known by the name which means a metal, but shall be henceforth called Eolarroon, which, translated from the ancient spoken language of the Haxomelians, means 'Wise Man from the Stars.'

"But what of your friends? Must they become Yultats?"

"No, Xinthquuls who are the Ten," hastily replied the Earthman. "If you do not harm them, I am sure that I shall be able to win them over to your cause eventually."

"*Our* cause." Steele winced a little at the icy reminder.

"I meant — our cause. Wait until after *we*," he emphasized the word, "have completed plans for our conquest. Then if I can't get them on our side they can be made into Yultats. But first, can I try to persuade them to join us?"

A short, hesitant pause, then:

"Yes, you may have a try at talking to them. But just to give them a taste of being a Yultat, we shall temporarily control these Outsiders, making them work for us. No! Do not speak against our words. We shall discuss the subject no further."

"Very well, Xinthquuls who are the Ten. Your word is law. Tell me, what are my duties?"

"Simply obey us. You are first to have a period of two nuljavpts—ten hours—in which to explore the city; then you will commence drilling a fleet of Yultats for rapid war maneuvering. You will constantly work at this drill until the Yultats respond to your suggestions as rapidly and as perfectly as do the muscles of your own body. It will not take long, since you already have a complete knowledge of steering Earth ships and these are of exactly the same pattern."

"I do not understand how I am to control these Yultats."

Thereupon, the Ten explained clearly and at great length just how, by a certain type of electrical impulse, the Earthman could so amplify and strengthen his thought commands that their power would rival that of the Ten themselves. Steele was given a complete outline of the construction of the "thought amplifier," but he was told that the Yultats would build it for him, since the Ten doubted his ability to turn out so delicate a machine.

Steele believed that the not so complicated mechanism could be made by himself easily, but since the time required for the unmechanical-minded Yultats to build it would give him a welcome ten-hour vacation in which to size up his chances for escape, he refrained from informing the Ten of this fact.

It seemed to the Earthman that the Xinthquuls were putting a dangerous weapon within his reach. They had for-

gotten that their lack of mechanical skill did not extend to the Earthman. But even so, he ruminated, he would probably never get near the necessary equipment which he must have to build an amplifier for his own use. And he doubted not that the one given to him by the Ten would be of the lowest power possible. Oh, if he could only get hold of such an instrument that would defy the thought-commands of the Xinthquuls!

Of course, all these thoughts had been masked behind the blankness of his thought-helmet; so to the Ten it appeared as if the man had suddenly become speechless, mentally speaking.

"Well, Eolarroon," Steele awoke from his revery to find the Ten's cold voice stabbing at his mind when he turned the control of his helmet to tune in on that particular receiving wave-length. "Well, Eolarroon, why stand you there like a Yultat? The interview is concluded. Go!"

11. The Crowning Horror

FOR many hours Steele tramped through the various buildings of the inner and outer cities, amazed and awed at the incredible ways of the moon-men.

When hungry and thirsty—the Xinthquuls had offered him no food—Steele munched half-heartedly on a tasteless concentrated food biscuit and sipped cautiously from one of the many running streamlets in the corridors of the stone city.

He needed no guide through the astounding underground city, for one of the countless Yultats swarming in the strangely quiet corridors was always at hand to answer his questions or to forbid his entrance to some secret apartment of the Xinthquuls. The Earthman did not try to force his way into any of the tabooed places, but went unobtrusively on his way. He was positive that the Xinthquuls did not let him out of their sight for an instant, watching him constantly through the vacant eyes of first one, then another, of their half-alive slaves. He knew that the Ten did not trust him fully.

All during his trip through the innumerable factories, mines, storehouses, and other less comprehensible chambers, the Earthman peered anxiously for implements and ways to escape. Without seeming to be more than normally observant, he carefully stored away in his mind all information that might possibly be of use later on.

Once his horror-stricken eyes fell upon the gaunt forms of some of the crew of the *Thunderbolt* and of his own ship, slaving away beside dead-faced Yultats, and he was informed that these men, who knew nothing of controlling space-ships, were permanently the vassals of the Xinthquuls, having had their minds sucked out by the vampires.

And once he saw Jack Starr, vacant-eyed, toiling away at some incomprehensible task, but he was not allowed to approach him. The lieutenant was stationed at a strategic point in Steele's vaguely evolving plan of escape. There was a broad-surfaced stone causeway between the outer city and the city wall. This ran entirely around the city like a gigantic race-track. Starr was working directly opposite a heavily barred metal gateway in the wall that was just in line with the dark, ragged opening of the tunnel mouth across the cave, so easily discernible in the glow about it.

One other thing was there at this portion of the city that was of grave import to Steele. This was the crew of Yultats who were busily engaged in erecting a monster flame-gun in a balcony just above Starr's head.

Thoughtfully, Steele continued on his way, searching now for the place where the captured Legion ships were kept.

IT WAS an hour before he found his goal, and because of the awful thing that preceded his finding the sleek hulls of the cruisers, he did not at first realize that the objects of his search lay before him.

For Steele had witnessed a ghastly demonstration of a terrible weapon of the Xinthquuls — the horribly more efficient companion to the gas of suspended animation.

It was when he had passed through the laboratories underneath the metal city that he discovered the tank of blood-red gas. It was located in a cavern directly below the center of the metal Xinthquul city.

"What does this tank contain?" Steele had demanded of the empty air, after tuning his thoughts so that they could be read by the Ten. A Yultat suddenly appeared as if from nowhere to commune with him.

"This is a tank of instant death, Eolarroon," droned the toneless thoughts of the slave. "In there is a quantity of the most diabolical gas ever discovered by the ancient race of Haxomelians in all their thousands of years of experimenting. Its complete formula, which we have but lately rediscovered, Eolarroon, is so complex as to be unexplainable to you. It takes a long time to produce even a little of the gas, and all that we have is stored here in this tank. We are manufacturing it for use in case we have more difficulty in mentally enslaving the peoples of Earth than we have contemplated. Also, all surplus Outsiders, those that are old and physically unable to work, will be exposed to this gas. It does such a complete, clean job of ridding any place of undesirables!

"Yes, Eolarroon, if an Outsider could only find out how to release this gas from its tank," the Yultat interrupted himself to say, "he could cause instantaneous death to us and to himself as well. But there is only one possible way to open this sturdily constructed tank, and that is known only to a few of our scientists. Fortunate, isn't it? Would you care for a demonstration of the work of the gas? All right, watch."

The Yultat then strode to what appeared to be a glass bulb in the floor near the tank.

"This transparent, fragile-looking globe would be more difficult to crack than the rest of the tank," explained the Yultat. He was evidently bent upon crushing all hopes that might arise in the breast of the Earthman. The latter sensed that, had there been a vulnerable spot in the tank, he would never have been allowed into the cavern.

"And now, Eolarroon," the Yultat was saying, "you must turn your back for a moment. No one, not even though he be a Xinthquul, may learn how to open this tank. And after the conclusion of this demonstration, you must leave this cave, never to enter it again.

"Now in a minute, you will see the manner in which works our most dangerous weapon to be used against Earth. Turn your back!"

Steele obediently swung around. His eyes caught sight of a huge flame-gun of the type used by the Legion, but shiny with newness, mounted on a tiny ledge over the cavern entrance. It was manned by three Yultats and was pointed directly at him. Its sighting-beam cast its soft light in a circle on the block of stone on which Steele was standing. The Earthman imagined that, should he attempt to disobey the Yultat's instructions, death would not be far off. He knew then, too,

that the Xinthquuls did not trust him as much as their words would imply.

After a time, the Earthman hesitantly faced the bulb again. Inside it stood the now motionless Yultat. The material of which the almost invisible bulb was composed evidently cut off all further thought-communication.

In silence Steele looked at the statue-like Yultat for a moment; then a minute, scarcely discernible puff of brilliant blood-red gas appeared in the container beside the Xinthquuls' slave. In fascination, the Earthman stared.

What followed, occurred much faster than it takes to tell of it. The puff of vivid color quickly and entirely enveloped the Yultat in a thin film. So thin was it, in fact, that it but very slightly tinged the now writhing body with a faint pinkish radiance. Then, before Steele's horrified gaze, the twisting creature's flesh *began to melt!* Steele did not even have time to close his eyes against the grisly sight, so quickly did it happen.

SICKENED beyond measure, the Earthman reeled out of the cavern and up the ramp. Of the Yultat nothing was left but an extremely tiny pool of slimy corruption, bubbling hideously on the floor of the transparent bulb. Swift death was one thing, but to see his own kind turned into sickening blobs of rotting jelly was more than the nauseated Steele's imagination could stand; such a thing could not be real! Such a minute quantity of gas to cause such an awful effect, so immediate, so complete! And this, groaned the shaken Earthman, soundlessly, was the horror that was to be loosed upon the defenseless, teeming millions of Earth! Such a revolting death could not be, his mind told him; yet his senses shocked with the truth that it was so.

Blindly the Earthman then made his way upward to the levels of the stone pavement; he felt that he must get a breath of clean, fresh air, else his nauseated brain would give way. The first sight that met his eyes was the hulls of the stolen Legion cruisers lying partly dismantled, in full view, on the causeway.

When at last the realization that the missing *Thunderbolt* and the *America VII,* as well as the recently captured *Meteor IV,* lay in plain sight not twenty yards away had soaked into his horror-dulled mind, Steele saw escape dangling temptingly before his eyes.

The crowning horror of the blood-red gas had clinched Steele's determination to make an immediate escape; so now, throwing caution to the winds, the Earthman headed straight for the three Legion cruisers in swift, running leaps at his highest possible speed.

In spite of the fact that all three of the ships were surrounded by Yultats, Steele did not stop to make plans, nor to avoid detection, but instead flung himself at the nearest cruiser with a savage, challenging roar.

Bowling over half a dozen Yultats who barred his way and warned him to go back, Steele landed beside the *Thunderbolt* in two prodigious leaps. The majority of the Yultats still paid no heed to his movements, although the Earthman saw some of the nearer ones heading in his direction. Steele, laughing aloud in high glee as he thought how easy it was going to be to escape, bounded up the ladder leading to the *Thunderbolt's* conning-tower. He looked into the control room and his laugh died in his throat, intermingled with a groan of despair.

The control room was devoid of instruments; it had been dismantled!

Don't miss the concluding chapters of this story in next month's issue. They are full of thrills and surprizes.

Colonel Markesan

By AUGUST W. DERLETH and MARK SCHORER

A blood-curdling story of a man who was dead and yet lived—a grim tale of corpses that walked and talked

I HESITATED to ring the bell.

Since that time I have thought many times how much better it would have been if I had not rung it, if I had gone away from that large lonely old house in the pine grove.

But I rang, and abruptly the door swung back.

Far back in the shadows of a darkened hall stood a tall, elderly man, dressed in a greenish black suit. The deep shadow flung across the doorway by the close-pressing trees and the darker blackness of the unlighted hall served to leave his outlines faint. He stood touching the door with an outstretched arm, and his strange, lustrous eyes were fixed upon me with disconcerting intensity.

"Can you direct me to Colonel Markesan's estate?" I asked.

"I am Colonel Markesan," said the man in the hall, speaking in a soft, pleasant voice.

"I've come in answer to your advertisement for a caretaker," I said.

"Come in," said Colonel Markesan.

I stepped into the house, and the colonel began to walk down the hall, leaving me to close the door. "Follow me, please," he murmured, and led the way from the shadowy corridor into a library which was as dark and gloomy as the hall. A strong odor of long-settled dust and long-undisturbed wood and cloth hung in the air.

"Sit down, please," said the colonel. He himself sat down as he spoke.

The room was so dark that I could see no more than the vague outlines of his head projecting over the chair, and the strange whiteness of his face and hands in the gloom.

"Your name?" asked Colonel Markesan.

"Frederick Bancroft."

"Age?"

"Twenty-seven."

"Any chronic ill health? Or nervousness?"

"No."

"Any experience?"

"None. I've been a school-teacher."

A momentary flicker of interest crossed the colonel's face. He looked quickly away from me and for a moment said nothing. Presently he faced me again and asked, "Have you any one depending on you?"

"No one but myself," I replied.

"Very good," said Colonel Markesan. "I need a strong young man to keep the estate in good shape; it has gone somewhat to seed in my absence, and I haven't the strength to keep it up. It must be perfectly clear, however, that I shall not care to be asked questions regarding the estate or any of my activities. I am prepared to pay well."

"What are the requirements?" I asked.

Colonel Markesan continued, "I have an aversion for society; you are to be my sole link with the world, for I seldom go out. You will begin your duties today by going into Boston to pay for the advertisement which brought you. Since I own no machine and my carriage lacks

"I knew not what hellish sorcery drew the dead from their tombs."

horses to draw it, you will have to walk. Fortunately, it isn't far. You will also attend to any other possible applicants by sending them away at once.

"By day you are to take care of the house and grounds. You will find everything you need in the shed beyond the house. I don't care to have you venture out at night; you must either stay in your room from dusk to dawn, or leave the house entirely for the night. In such cases, you must leave at once after dinner, which you will eat alone and prepare for yourself, since I employ no other person, and you must not return until after sunrise."

Colonel Markesan paused, as if awaiting protest from me. I made none. His requirements, which impressed me as those of a confirmed misanthrope, were not particularly difficult.

Since I said nothing, he went on. "If my requirements seem odd, you must overlook that. If you can't, you may as well leave at once."

"Your requirements seem strange, yes, but I'll be glad to carry them out as you wish," I replied.

COLONEL MARKESAN nodded and rose. He walked noiselessly to a cabinet lost in the shadows save for a thin green-

ish light which penetrated the shutters of a near-by window and faintly outlined the surface of the old cabinet. This the colonel opened, and from it he took a packet of bills, which he gave to me, saying, "I think that will pay at least a month's expenses."

After I had taken the money, he added, "That concludes the immediate business between us. Pray do not disturb me with any problems confronting you in the course of your duties; solve them as you please, as long as you don't infringe upon my fundamental rules."

With this final instruction, Colonel Markesan turned on his heel and glided over the soft carpet to the almost hidden door of an adjoining room, through which he vanished into the blackness beyond.

I hesitated for a moment; then I made my way to a window, opened it, and pushed back the shutter. The sunlight fell on an old-fashioned red rug into which a large flower pattern had been woven, and the details of the room were brought to sudden, dusty life—a few very stiff, obviously antique chairs, a handsome table, the cabinet, and shelves lining the walls upon which books were evenly and neatly arranged, and obviously not much in use. The entire room showed little sign of usage, for it was devoid of any token of life. I looked at last at the packet of money in my hands and was faintly amused to find that the bills were still the old large kind which had gone out of circulation some years before. A later examination showed that not one of them had been printed later than 1907.

Shortly after, I left the house and caught a ride into Boston.

On my return to the Markesan estate, I put my bags down outside the front door and made my way around the house to the small wooden shed deep in the foliage of tall bushes where my gardening equipment was stored. The tools were apparently very old, and were rusted, though still usable. When I left the shed presently, I observed that the estate must run back a good distance, for as far as I could see through the woodland, no fence line broke the expanse. The vastness of the estate and its comparative silence brought a depressing feeling of loneliness which even the raucous cawing of a few crows in the pine trees could not dispel.

As I went down the hall with my bags I observed that a light was burning in the library, for the doorway of that room was limned in a strange, green glow, and shadows were flickering across the black rug in the hall. I deposited my bags at the foot of the staircase and entered the library, where I saw a solitary green candle alight on the table. Beneath the candle was a note, held down by a small bunch of keys.

The note was short:

"Mr. Bancroft: I have been called away, and am not sure when I will return. Your room is at the head of the stairs. There you may do as you please. Molest nothing in the remaining rooms, excepting the kitchen. Avoid opening windows, please. Here are the keys of the house, also. Go to work on the grounds when you wish.

"COLONEL MARKESAN."

My room was bright and comfortable and in obvious readiness for a tenant. Though a bathroom adjoined, the room lacked all electric fixtures. The single window of the room was set deep in the wall and protected by iron bars set recently from the outside. This discovery disconcerted me somewhat, and my trepidation was considerably increased when I discovered on leaving the room that my door was fitted with a bolt on the outside, making it possible for my employer to lock me in at his wish. Apparently Colonel Markesan was determined that I

should have no chance to disregard his order and leave my room after once retiring in the evening.

WHEN I had unpacked my bags, I went in search of the kitchen. I discovered that every cupboard and shelf was empty, a discovery which made necessary another immediate trip into Cambridge, where I purchased supplies for several days.

It was lunchtime when I returned, and I prepared my first meal. The colonel's promise that I would eat alone was borne out, for no one appeared then or during the remainder of that day, most of which I spent working on the grounds. When at last I retired to my room in accordance with instructions, Colonel Markesan had not reappeared.

I had been in my room scarcely a half-hour when I heard the sharp sound of iron grating on iron—the sound of a bolt sliding home just beyond my threshold. For a startling moment I sat listening; then, hearing nothing, I rose and cautiously tried the door. It was locked from the outside. I felt a chill apprehension upon reflecting that Colonel Markesan had certainly not been in the house when I had gone to my room, and I had not heard a sound to indicate that any one had since entered. Yet the colonel must have returned.

I went to bed that night with reluctance.

Next morning some one had slipped the bolt on my door before dawn. There was no sign of my employer, nor did he appear during the forenoon. Yet, while I was working toward noon in the deeply shaded grounds just behind the house, I happened to look upward, and saw the unmistakable gray-white face and lustrous eyes of my employer gazing out at me from a second-floor window! Even as I looked, he vanished from sight.

My momentary amazement, however, was dissipated when I reflected that Colonel Markesan could easily have returned to the house by the front way while I was engaged in the rear. For an instant I thought that he was for some reason in hiding in the house, but that this thought was groundless I learned when I met him later in the day moving effortlessly along the lower hall. His eyes passing fleetly over my face as he nodded, left an inexplicable impression of something to be feared. Yet Colonel Markesan was outwardly an attractive man in his sixties, with firm and harmonious features, and there was no reason for the persistence of the sinister feeling my momentary encounter with him had inspired.

That night again I had hardly gone to my room when I heard the bolt slide to, but by this time I had come to the conclusion that my employer was an eccentric whose wages compensated me for whatever idiosyncrasies I was forced to tolerate.

In this fashion a week went by. Now and then I caught sight of my singular employer, but in all that time his sole conversation with me concerned his life in Virginia, from where he had evidently returned to Massachusetts, his native state. I learned, too, that the house in which we were living was over a century and a half old, and had always been the property of the Markesan family. I did not once encounter the colonel beyond the house. Meanwhile, my work went along well, and I lived pleasantly enough.

ON THE tenth night after I had taken up residence with Colonel Markesan, my sleep was disturbed by a sound from below, a sound that to my semi-conscious ears bore a startling resem-

blance to a man's shout. I was awake instantly. The sound recurred, together with what seemed to be a woman's muffled scream. Following these sounds came a low murmur as of many voices whispering somewhere in the house. Apparently Colonel Markesan had visitors, though having visitors seemed incongruous with my employer's personality as it impressed me. I listened until the murmur from below ebbed from my consciousness and sleep overcame me.

In the morning I looked casually for any signs of the presence of others besides Colonel Markesan, but found none. Not a chair had been misplaced, not a footstep disturbed the dusty ground about the doors leading from the house. Yet there remained no doubt in my mind of what I had heard in the night. The memory troubled me all day, and when I began to put together the other strange factors relating to my employment — Colonel Markesan's strange appearances and disappearances, the conditions under which I remained nightly in my room, the colonel's uncanny personal appearance — I was alarmed and uneasy.

I brooded on the matter until my curiosity and vague fear mounted to such a degree that I could no longer rest. I had to know what went on in the house at night, and accordingly, I immediately went to work on my door, making an aperture between door and casement so that I could, by means of a thin steel rod, slip the bolt from within. That night, I determined, I would try to ascertain what went on below, even at the risk of discovery and discharge.

Shortly after I retired to my room, the bolt slipped to as usual. Again, despite the most intense concentration, I did not hear footfalls. However, since the stairs and halls of the old house were deeply carpeted, lightly treading feet would make little sound.

I waited. And then, abruptly, the whispering began from below.

FOR a few minutes I listened with my ear against the door. Then I took off my shoes and manipulated the bolt; it slipped back without the slightest sound. I turned the knob, and pulled the door back, then slipped quietly out into the hall and made my way down the stairs to a landing. Then I looked down over the banister.

Below me, limned in the strange green light which once before had attracted my eye, was the entrance to the drawing-room, into which I could look easily. There were six people in the glow of the green candles. One of them was my employer, and of them all, he alone seemed to be enjoying himself, for his usually immobile face was broken by a smile. The faces of the others were indistinct, and one visitor, sitting far back from the light, caused me a thrill of horror, for it seemed as if he had no face. The source of the whispering was now perfectly clear, for as I watched I saw Colonel Markesan address one after the other of his visitors, and I waited with marked eagerness for their replies. It occurred to me uneasily that Colonel Markesan's guests were not in the house voluntarily, for there emanated from them an atmosphere of hostility so distinct that I felt it even on the stairs.

Suddenly one of the visitors rose and made for the door, forcing me back up the stairs and into my room, but not before I saw Colonel Markesan bar the way by occupying the threshold and heard his rasping voice, "I am master—you can do nothing unless I will it!"

The face of the man who had tried to force his way from the room was famil-

iar. I again slipped the bolt to, and in the quiet of my room searched my memory for clues to his identity—Symphony Hall—the Saturday evening concerts—the man who used to sit across the aisle from me—Doctor Merlin Grant, Harvard physicist! But Doctor Grant had been dead three months—had been drowned while on vacation at Annisquam. Horror ran suddenly through me, for my conviction was unshakable: though dead, Merlin Grant was downstairs in Colonel Markesan's drawing-room!

That night I did not sleep.

As early as possible next morning I examined the dusty paths leading to the house—and there was no footstep save mine to mar the ground near the doors! My astonishment was unbounded, for certainly my employer had had guests in the night. Though, upon waking, I had momentarily thought that my glance at Doctor Grant the previous night was an illusion, I now began to reconsider cautiously. Suddenly a terrifying thought struck me—could it be that not only had I indeed not erred—that I had actually seen the dead Merlin Grant in the night, but that all those eery visitors were as dead as he?

I thrust the horrible fear from me, yet I could not forget. That day I went into Boston and looked up Colonel Markesan in the Public Records Office and in newspaper files. Though I learned little about my employer, I was considerably agitated and shocked to find that he was the same Robert Crawford Markesan, the Harvard professor who, after a scandalous affair precipitated by his avowal that he could raise the dead, was summarily dropped from Harvard's austere staff. His "lapse" was quickly forgotten, and Professor Markesan had retired to Virginia, where he assumed the title of Colonel. Of his activities in recent years there was no information.

It was not until some hours had passed that my sluggish mind began to piece together a ghastly connection between what I read and what I had seen the preceding night. The thought of returning to the house in the pine grove became every moment more unattractive. Yet, despite my strong impulse not to go back, I did return shortly after noon.

That night I watched again.

The bolt had hardly been closed before I pried it back and stepped into the deserted hall. As I stood there, I heard the rear door of the house close softly. I made my way rapidly down the stairs and cautiously opened the door.

The vague and shadowy figure of Colonel Markesan was visible in the dusk of the descending night. He was crossing the lawn under the trees, and had evidently struck out for a little path running through fields and private estates into Cambridge. But if he contemplated going into the city, why didn't he take the shorter highway running past the house?

For only a moment I hesitated. Then I stepped from the house, sped into the darkening shadows, and followed him. Fortunately, the path was heavily shrouded by bushes on either side, so that it was possible to vanish instantly into the brush. Colonel Markesan moved along at extraordinary speed, increasing as the distance from the house widened. He seemed no longer to walk, but to glide along in a queer flaffing motion.

We had gone slightly over half a mile when Colonel Markesan abruptly left the path, and when I came to the spot where he had diverged, I was astonished to find that he had disappeared. There was but one place he might have gone—near-by

Mount Auburn Cemetery, one of whose side gates was not ten steps from the path.

I ran forward silently and looked cautiously through the bars of the gate. Colonel Markesan was in the cemetery, walking slowly down a long lane cutting deep into the burial ground. I attempted to open the gate to follow, but I found it locked. However, my surprize was somewhat abated when I discovered a loose bar which would have enabled a man as thin as my employer to enter, though I reflected immediately that Colonel Markesan had accomplished his entrance in a remarkably short time. But my conjectures were abruptly dropped, for my employer had paused before a tomb not far from the side gate.

He stood for some moments in dead silence. Then he began to talk in his sibilant voice, now potent with sinister menace which sent a shudder through me. I crouched back against the stone wall.

Then, before my eyes, an extraordinary thing took place. As Colonel Markesan spoke, a faint radiance began to glow near the door of the vault, and as I watched, it began to take form, growing darker, apparently more solid. And then, in the space of a minute, a man stood at Colonel Markesan's side!

My horror mounted, but my impulse to flee was drowned in my curiosity. Colonel Markesan was moving forward, beckoning with one hand to the thing from the tomb, which followed obediently. The two of them stopped at a second tomb, where once again Colonel Markesan repeated his hellish procedure. This time a woman was drawn to join the man, and together those two went flaffing after the colonel.

Then I turned and fled, the memory of those pathetic and terrible ghosts haunting my flight.

Back at the house, I bolted myself into my room. I wanted to go away, but I lacked the courage; I feared that Colonel Markesan might suspect and follow me into the city. Yet I could not again endure what went on below, knowing not what hellish sorcery drew the dead from their tombs! I solved the problem at last by taking two veronal tablets, and before any sound from below broke into my somnolence, I slept.

DESPITE what I had seen, I could not go in search of Colonel Markesan next morning and tell him I was leaving. I was held back, too, by the vague hope that I might somehow prevent him from exercising his magic powers. Thinking along this line, I formulated a plan, and as the first step, I went into Cambridge and called upon Professor Karl Hohlden of Harvard's science department, one of the men whose name had been linked with the Markesan scandal years before. Since I myself had done work under Hohlden some years ago, he received me cordially.

I plunged at once into the story of the weird occurrences. At the mention of my employer's name, Hohlden went oddly pale.

"Did you say *Markesan?* You can't mean Professor Markesan?" he asked.

I nodded. "He calls himself Colonel now," I explained.

"Can you describe the man?"

I described Colonel Markesan briefly, and my description agitated Professor Hohlden very much.

"I'm afraid such things can't be, Bancroft," he said when I had finished. "They just don't happen. Perhaps you've been suffering from mental shock, or perhaps you've been reading about that affair

at the university some years ago and have begun to imagine things."

I laughed hollowly. "Unfortunately, such is not the case," I replied. "I could wish it were. My experience has been too distressingly real."

I saw abruptly that Professor Hohlden was not very firm in his disbelief in my story. He rose suddenly and left the room, murmuring something about sending a telegram.

When he returned, he seemed calmer.

With infinite patience, he went over the facts of my story with me, and in the end he admitted that if delusion were ruled out, then mine was the only explanation. But though outwardly he continued to think that everything I had seen was delusion bordering upon madness, there was in his words a strong suggestion of belief.

"I'm afraid you think I'm mad as a hatter," I said at last. "I could wish that, too. But I don't think I am. I want you to come out there with me—tonight. I want you to stay through the night. I want you to *see!*"

At this moment a telegram was handed in to Professor Hohlden. Eagerly he ripped open the envelope and read the message. His face paled, and for a moment he stood with closed eyes. Then he turned to me and said, "I'll go with you."

At the same time he handed the telegram to me, saying, "Read it. I was afraid of that."

I took the telegram and read it:

"COLONEL MARKESAN DIED THREE YEARS AGO. BURIED ON FAMILY ESTATE OUTSIDE CAMBRIDGE."

I groaned. "I should have known, if it weren't so impossible," I said. For I knew now why Colonel Markesan kept to the darkest part of the house, why his footsteps were soundless, why he could vanish so quickly at will, why he left no tracks in the dust beyond the house. "But what can we do now?" I asked. "How can we fight a dead man?"

"Wait," cautioned Professor Hohlden. "Wait until I've seen what's going on in his house."

I called the Markesan house, but it was only after repeated trials that I heard my employer's voice on the wire. I asked him whether it would be all right for me to bring an old friend for the night, a friend who understood the conditions as I knew them. Colonel Markesan agreed only with a reluctance which he took no pains to conceal.

THUS it was that, shortly after dinner, which we had in Cambridge, Professor Hohlden and I arrived at the house, where we went immediately to my room. Colonel Markesan was not in evidence. Since it was not yet time for me to retire to my room for the night, Hohlden, realizing that he might be recognized by his old colleague if he ventured from the room, suggested that I go out to the family vault and see if indeed the colonel rested there.

The vault was set in the close-pressing bushes beyond the shed at the rear of the house. I played safe, and went first into the shed, from which I looked warily back toward the house, searching every window. There was no one at watch, I felt sure. Then I slipped from the single window in the back wall of the shed, and under cover of the bushes made my way to the vault.

It opened easily enough. Inside, one wall was lined with a row of name-plates, marking coffins sealed in rock. I looked for that of Colonel Markesan, but failed to find it. As I turned to leave the vault, I caught sight of one of the name-plates which had been lifted out of place and set on the floor, and saw that

the space for the coffin gaped empty. I turned the plate over and read:

Robert Crawford Markesan
Born 17 May, 1867—Died 7 April, 1929

The coffin had obviously been removed to some other place on the estate, and so I pointed out to Professor Hohlden upon my return to my room. "And that means an intensive search, for the estate is large," I added.

But Professor Hohlden shook his head. "I don't think so. I'm sure the coffin will be somewhere in the house; otherwise there could have been no better hiding-place than the vault."

While we were sitting in silence shortly after, the bolt of my door slipped to. Hohlden was impressed at this first evidence of my strange story, and it was clear that his disbelief was fading rapidly. We took off our shoes and sat waiting.

About two hours after we had retired to my room, the sound of voices rose from below. I slipped back the bolt, and the professor and I went into the hall.

I led the way cautiously to the landing on the stairs. There we looked into the shadowy gathering below, seeing the weirdly green faces of men both of us knew to be long dead.

Almost at once Hohlden gripped my arm convulsively. "Good God!" he exclaimed, "—Charing, Grant, Latimer!"

I warned him to be silent, but he did not hear me. "Look," he continued, "—the little man in the corner; he's Charing, my old colleague, dead eight years—he was one of us who forced Markesan out. They all belong to our group, every one of them."

I saw Charing huddled in a chair, his gray-green face twisted with pain. As we watched, Markesan approached and began to taunt him. We caught references to the power of the mind over death and the souls and bodies of the dead. But the scene proved too much for Hohlden, who turned abruptly and retreated to my room. I followed, and found him collapsed in a chair.

"Charing, poor devil!" he murmured. "And Grant, and Latimer, and the others! Bancroft, we've got to end this!"

"But how?" I asked.

"We must find Markesan's body and destroy it. Good God! who could have dreamed that he might be right—that he had control of some secret — magic or scientific—that gave him power over the dead? He goes to the graves, you said, and draws them forth. His power is probably hypnotic, and yet it's hard to tell. He's proved his original point—that the spirits of the dead do exist in some place beyond earth."

A cry from below interrupted Hohlden. We sat looking at each other with haggard eyes.

"Now," said Hohlden suddenly. "We've got to do it now—we can't wait another minute. I can't stand the thought of this meaningless torture for the rest of the night."

"But wait," I cautioned. "Markesan will see and recognize us."

"Of course he will! That won't make any difference. He has no power over the living—he is master only over the dead!"

SNATCHING the lamp from the bureau, Hohlden flung back the door and strode out into the hall, his eyes gleaming fiercely. From the landing we saw that Colonel Markesan, having doubtless heard the sound of the door and Hohlden's careless footsteps, stood looking upward, his lustrous green eyes fixed balefully upon us.

I hesitated, but Hohlden did not. Straight down the stairs he went. Colonel Markesan came forward, and the two

of them met at the threshold of the drawing-room. Colonel Markesan averted his face from the glare of the lamp.

"So Bancroft brought you, Hohlden," he murmured.

"I've come to end this, Markesan," said Hohlden harshly.

As he spoke he thrust the lamp rudely into Markesan's face, causing the colonel to stumble backward.

"You don't like the light, do you, Markesan?" said Hohlden. "You never did, I remember—always preferred the dark. You will have plenty of darkness soon."

He had been advancing upon the colonel as Markesan was falling back into the room, and he continued to thrust the lamp forward. Then suddenly Colonel Markesan flung himself backward and away through heavy portiers, between two book-cases.

His move came so suddenly that for a moment Hohlden was too surprized to pursue. Then he leapt forward, and I followed. But Colonel Markesan was not in the adjoining room. Frantically Hohlden ran the length of the room and out into the hall. Still there was no sign of Colonel Markesan.

"No use losing our heads," said Hohlden then. "He's in the house somewhere—we've got to find him. I think if we can manage to decapitate him, we'll end his horrible undead existence. We've got to find the place where he hides."

We began a systematic search through the entire house. I carried my revolver. Because we had at first looked only cursorily into the attic and cellar, we went over them a second time. And yet we did not find Colonel Markesan.

Finally we returned to the drawing-room. Dawn was penetrating the heavy pines around the house, and it would soon be light enough to aid our search. But as Hohlden preceded me into the drawing-room, he gave a sharp cry of dismay.

I peered over his shoulder and saw oddly crumpled bodies—most of which were not bodies at all, but weird masses of still white flesh. In our haste to capture the colonel, we had forgotten his unfortunate victims.

"Good God," Hohlden muttered, "how can we get these back to their graves? How can we explain—*we can't!*"

He turned on me in horror. "And we can't leave them here! We've got to look until we find, Bancroft."

"But we have looked everywhere," I protested.

He nodded, disturbed. Then suddenly he turned. "No, we haven't!" he exclaimed. "We haven't looked behind the wood in the wood cellar!"

He bolted from the room and descended directly into the wood cellar.

"See," he said, "those fire-logs—how far out they're piled. He's here—he must be!"

He began to tear them away. He had not gone far when I saw the top of the coffin, standing on end behind the wood. We pulled away the logs until we had cleared the whole space before it.

But the most ghastly part of our task was yet before us. Even the professor hesitated a moment to attack the coffin with our only tool, an ax which stood against the wall, and which must later perform an even more disagreeable task of which I hesitated to think. We had little trouble with the coffin, for the lid swung open easily, and there before us was the body of Colonel Markesan!

THE corpse was clothed in a stiff black suit that had turned a little green. The face was gray-white, the mouth and

cheeks sunken, the eyes closed. A faint odor of medicine came from the coffin.

The professor motioned me to stand away, and raised the ax to strike. Then, to our horror, the eyelids of the corpse began to flutter, the corners of its mouth began to twitch, an arm moved slightly —*the thing before us was coming to life!*

Hohlden brought the ax downward, and at the same instant a stiff arm shot out from the coffin and clutched at the handle. Then Colonel Markesan came to furious life. His dark eyes fully open, he stumbled awkwardly from the confining coffin, tore the ax from Hohlden's nerveless fingers, and flung it into the woodpile. Then, with automatic precision, the dead man's arms reached for Hohlden.

How that dead thing fought! Like a machine, taking blow after blow without apparent injury, striking again and again. I do not know how long I stood frozen with horror, watching that unnatural battle, until my eyes fell upon the ax in the corner. Then I set the lamp on the woodpile, scrambled for the weapon, and struck blindly at the thing which was bearing Professor Hohlden to the floor.

My blow laid open the back of Colonel Markesan's neck. He fell, crumpling grotesquely, and a frightful greenish-red liquid began to ooze from the cut.

Instantly the professor was at my side. He tore the ax from my hands and with one stroke decapitated the body. The head of Colonel Markesan rolled awkwardly away in a half-circle, coming to rest finally against Professor Hohlden's ankle. As Hohlden jerked his foot away, a sharp cry of pain escaped his lips.

Perhaps the professor was too quick in moving his leg, perhaps the ghastly life which had animated the body yet moved the severed head, for I saw that somehow Colonel Markesan's teeth had caught and ripped open the flesh of Hohlden's ankle.

For a fleeting moment I had the horrible impression that the awful eyes in the head were open—then I kicked the head frantically away.

"God!—let's get out of here," I murmured.

Hohlden nodded weakly, took a step forward, and almost collapsed. Amazed, he looked down at the slight wound on his ankle. It was purpling rapidly.

"Good God!" muttered Hohlden, "poison — whatever it was that gave Markesan his awful life——"

Hohlden grasped frantically at his throat, then pitched forward.

I came to my knees at his side, catching up his head. He opened his lips weakly, then his head lolled to one side. So lethal was the fluid in Colonel Markesan's body that Hohlden was dead within two minutes after having been bit.

For a moment I was too stunned to move. Then I thought of escape, came to my feet, and ran from the cellar. But I was only half-way up the stairs when I realized that I could never hope to tell any one of what had gone on here, that furthermore, I could not leave those pathetic remains in the drawing-room—I must destroy them, even as I must destroy the body of the fiend who had brought them here from their graves. And so, too, Professor Hohlden's death must be concealed.

Reluctantly, yet swiftly, I returned to the cellar. I took up the lamp and threw it with all my might against a pile of kindling, where it exploded and immediately set the wood on fire.

Then I fled the house, leaving that accursed building in the pines a roaring inferno of flames which consumed all that was mortal of Colonel Markesan and his unfortunate victims, and brought eternal rest to the tortured dead in Mount Auburn Cemetery.

Mandolin

By WILL CHARLES OURSLER

A brief story about a composer who thought his inspiration had gone for ever

"NO, I can not do it. I break my contract, I know. But music is gone from me; I can no longer compose."

"But you can't do this to me, Rand. We're old friends. I've promised to have at least one piece by you in our next production. You can't let me down."

"I'm sorry, Wolfson. We are old friends, but I can't do the impossible. And it is impossible for me to compose anything now that sounds like music. I'm through."

"Perhaps you'll change your mind."

After Wolfson was gone, Gordon Rand leaned back in his chair, and in silence watched the butler clear the table. A quiet filled the room. Drunken shadows from the candle danced silently on the panelled walls; the corners were lost in leaden gloom.

"Squires!"

"Yes, sir."

"I'm going to sleep tonight in the bedroom."

"In the bedroom, sir? You mean the room that was——"

"The room I shared with my wife. I know it hasn't been used since—since last year. But to arrange the place won't take you long. I guess I'm just sentimental, Squires, but you see, it was a year ago tonight that my wife died. Nothing but sentiment, Squires."

"I know. I didn't remind you, sir. One doesn't always wish to be reminded of such things, if you'll pardon my saying so. Is there anything else?"

"Oh, yes, Squires. You remember my wife's mandolin?"

"Yes, sir. It's in its case, in a corner of the library."

"Now look. First of all, pack my suitcase for my trip tomorrow. Then bring the suitcase and mandolin to the bedroom. I'm taking both with me, and I must be all set to leave. And bring some wood to the bedroom, too; I may make a fire later."

"Very good, sir. Good-night, sir."

ALONE, Mr. Rand rose from the table, walked to the mantel, and switched on a light. The shadowed portrait above him seemed to come to life. Lustrous eyes of a beautiful woman looked gravely down at him; one might almost have thought the soft lips were about to speak.

"It won't be long now, dear—not long." His words broke the stillness. "I'm coming to join you."

He could bear it no longer. One whole year of living without her; one wretched year of hell! The world needed him? Needed a composer whose music was dead, whose notes had become jarring and discordant? He had been a great composer once, perhaps; that time was over. He would never write music again; the world would be better off without him.

Tomorrow, he was going to Roaring Falls, for a rest and a change of scene.

He laughed mirthlessly. At least, it would be a change; one could say no more. In the swirling torrent of the falls he would find swift and sure death; beyond that, he did not care.

"Tomorrow, Alice. Tomorrow."

The bedroom was a book, a diary of past hours; a book which Gordon Rand alone could read. Trivial, forgotten scenes re-enacted themselves before him. How many times he had built a fire for the two of them! He stood before the struggling flame and poked at the smoldering logs. Now he had the blaze crackling arrogantly in the grate; methodically, he put the smoking fire-irons back on their stand, and turned around, half expecting to find her there, her kind eyes upon him. How vain the hope!

He sat long before the fire; dreaming, wishing, wondering. Fate had taken from him the only thing in life that counted; there was no use going on. Music, too, was gone from his soul. It had been there when he had written their piece; her piece. The melody ran through his mind now, tormentingly. He had better go to bed.

He undressed slowly. By the time he finished his toilet, the red embers glowed only dully, sullenly, in the grate. The room was nearly dark. He opened the window wide and went to bed. Ordinarily he would have lain awake for some time; his mind was upset and excited. But it had been a long day, and his body needed rest. He was asleep in a few minutes. Outside, the wind howled wildly through the trees.

MUSIC! He fought his way back to consciousness, and opened his eyes. The room was pitch-black. He had only been dreaming, of course. Dreaming that she played for him! The mandolin had sounded so real. Their piece!

A soft tinkle reached him, as if someone were really playing the instrument. What was that? His senses could not deceive him now; he was awake. Someone must be there; some madman, strumming tunelessly on the mandolin. He could hear the notes clearly now. This was real. Someone was in the room. Quickly he sprang from his bed, and switched on the lights.

The room was empty.

He shut the window, put on his dressing-robe, and went to examine the mandolin. It was safe in its case. Impossible! Yet no one could have put it away and escaped, without a sound.

He put out the light, opened the window and returned to bed. Wide awake now, he listened carefully. There it was, those notes. Music! Music from a mandolin shut in its case! A cold shiver ran through him, a shiver of delight, of wonder. It *was* real, and it could mean one thing only; a sign from her.

"I understand now." His voice was low, barely audible.

SQUIRES woke him in the morning with breakfast.

"Good morning, sir. Mr. Wolfson is waiting to see you. You had better hurry, sir, or you'll miss the train."

"I'm not going to take it, Squires. Bring Mr. Wolfson up here; he won't mind if I'm still in bed. I want to talk to him."

The butler ushered Mr. Wolfson in, and stood at attention at the foot of the bed.

"Sit down, Wolfson."

"Well, how do you feel about it today?"

"I've changed my mind."

"Good! Wonderful! Grand! My Lord, what did it?"

"You're an old friend, Wolfson, and

I'll tell you. I know you won't let it get out.—No, stay here, Squires. You've known me since I was a child. I want you to hear this, too."

He paused.

"I was going to commit suicide today, Wolfson. I was going to kill myself. Fed up with everything. I wanted something of my wife's near me when I died; I was taking her mandolin. But last night, in this room, I had a sign. Someone played that mandolin. I didn't dream it; I heard it with my own ears. Yet no one was here, and the instrument was in its case. I tell you, it was a voice from the beyond. That's what changed my mind, Wolfson."

"Sure, old man." The producer smiled indulgently. "I won't speak of it to anyone. Now, when are you going to start on my work?"

"Today—at once!"

He leapt from bed, threw on his robe, and hurried downstairs. Mr. Wolfson trailed after him.

Squires stayed behind. He opened the windows to air the place, and began to make the bed.

Suddenly he stopped. That tinkle! it was what Mr. Rand must have heard. But this came from the fireplace. In a second he realized; it was the pokers, the tongs, swinging in the wind from the window.

"But I shan't mention it to Mr. Rand," said Squires.

Downstairs, someone was at the piano. The butler heard swelling, rapturous music that filled the morning with its beauty.

The Woods of Averoigne

(Inspired by Clark Ashton Smith's stories)

By GRACE STILLMAN

Deep in the woods of Averoigne,
  Goblin and satyr, loup-garou,
Devil and vampire hold their feasts:
  Forces of wizardry imbue
Even the foliage of the oak;
  Beeches and pines in drear decay
Uplift their bony branches wan
  Under a sky of corpse-like gray.
Evil is there in Averoigne:
  Evil I should not see at all;
Evil whose very presence seems
  Holding me in a curious thrall:
Knowing it well, my feet still grope
  Nearer this force malign, withdrawn;
In dread, against my will I creep
  Deep in the woods of Averoigne.

He Walked by Day

By JULIUS LONG

A strange tale about a man who declared he was a ghost—a story that is off the beaten path

FRIEDENBURG, Ohio, sleeps between the muddy waters of the Miami River and the rusty track of a little-used spur of the Big Four. It suddenly became important to us because of its strategic position. It bisected a road which we were to surface with tar. The materials were to come by way of the spur and to be unloaded at the tiny yard.

We began work on a Monday morning. I was watching the tar distributer while it pumped tar from the car, when I felt a tap upon my back. I turned about, and when I beheld the individual who had tapped me, I actually jumped.

I have never, before or since, encountered such a singular figure. He was at least seven feet tall, and he seemed even taller than that because of the uncommon slenderness of his frame. He looked as if he had never been warmed by the rays of the sun, but confined all his life in a dank and dismal cellar. I concluded that he had been the prey of some insidious, etiolating disease. Certainly, I thought, nothing else could account for his ashen complexion. It seemed that not blood, but shadows passed through his veins.

"Do you want to see me?" I asked.

"Are you the road feller?"

"Yes."

"I want a job. My mother's sick. I have her to keep. Won't you please give me a job?"

We really didn't need another man, but I was interested in this pallid giant with his staring, gray eyes. I called to Juggy, my foreman.

"Do you think we can find a place for this fellow?" I asked.

Juggy stared incredulously. "He looks like he'd break in two."

"I'm stronger'n anyone," said the youth.

He looked about, and his eyes fell on the Mack, which had just been loaded with six tons of gravel. He walked over to it, reached down and seized the hub of a front wheel. To our utter amazement, the wheel was slowly lifted from the ground. When it was raised to a height of eight or nine inches, the youth looked inquiringly in our direction. We must have appeared sufficiently awed, for he dropped the wheel with an abruptness that evoked a yell from the driver, who thought his tire would blow out.

"We can certainly use this fellow," I said, and Juggy agreed.

"What's your name, Shadow?" he demanded.

"Karl Rand," said the boy, but "Shadow" stuck to him, as far as the crew was concerned.

We put him to work at once, and he slaved all morning, accomplishing tasks that we ordinarily assigned two or three men to do.

We were on the road at lunchtime, some miles from Friedenburg. I recalled that Shadow had not brought his lunch.

"You can take mine," I said. "I'll drive in to the village and eat."

"I never eat none," was Shadow's astonishing remark.

"You never eat!" The crew had heard his assertion, and there was an amused crowd about him at once. I fancied that he was pleased to have an audience.

"No, I never eat," he repeated. "You see"—he lowered his voice—"you see, I'm a ghost!"

We exchanged glances. So Shadow was psychopathic. We shrugged our shoulders.

"Whose ghost are you?" gibed Juggy. "Napoleon's?"

"Oh, no. I'm my own ghost. You see, I'm dead."

"Ah!" This was all Juggy could say. For once, the arch-kidder was nonplussed.

"That's why I'm so strong," added Shadow.

"How long have you been dead?" I asked.

"Six years. I was fifteen years old then."

"Tell us how it happened. Did you die a natural death, or were you killed trying to lift a fast freight off the track?" This question was asked by Juggy, who was slowly recovering.

"It was in the cave," answered Shadow solemnly. "I slipped and fell over a bank. I cracked my head on the floor. I've been a ghost ever since."

"Then why do you walk by day instead of by night?"

"I got to keep my mother."

Shadow looked so sincere, so pathetic when he made this answer, that we left off teasing him. I tried to make him eat my lunch, but he would have none of it. I expected to see him collapse that afternoon, but he worked steadily and showed no sign of tiring. We didn't know what to make of him. I confess that I was a little afraid in his presence. After all, a madman with almost superhuman strength is a dangerous character. But Shadow seemed perfectly harmless and docile.

WHEN we had returned to our boarding-house that night, we plied our landlord with questions about Karl Rand. He drew himself up authoritatively, and lectured for some minutes upon Shadow's idiosyncrasies.

"The boy first started telling that story about six years ago," he said. "He never was right in his head, and nobody paid much attention to him at first. He said he'd fallen and busted his head in a cave, but everybody knows they ain't no caves hereabouts. I don't know what put that idea in his head. But Karl's stuck to it ever since, and I 'spect they's lots of folks round Friedenburg that's growed to believe him—more'n admits they do."

That evening, I patronized the village barber shop, and was careful to introduce Karl's name into the conversation. "All I can say is," said the barber solemnly, "that his hair ain't growed any in the last six years, and they was nary a whisker on his chin. No, sir, nary a whisker on his chin."

This did not strike me as so tremendously odd, for I had previously heard of cases of such arrested growth. However, I went to sleep that night thinking about Shadow.

The next morning, the strange youth appeared on time and rode with the crew to the job.

"Did you eat well?" Juggy asked him.

Shadow shook his head. "I never eat none."

The crew half believed him.

Early in the morning, Steve Bradshaw, the nozzle man on the tar distributer, burned his hand badly. I hurried him in to see the village doctor. When he had dressed Steve's hand, I took advantage

of my opportunity and made inquiries about Shadow.

"Karl's got me stumped," said the country practitioner. "I confess I can't understand it. Of course, he won't let me get close enough to him to look at him, but it don't take an examination to tell there's something abnormal about him."

"I wonder what could have given him the idea that he's his own ghost," I said.

"I'm not sure, but I think what put it in his head was the things people used to say to him when he was a kid. He always looked like a ghost, and everybody kidded him about it. I kind of think that's what gave him the notion."

"Has he changed at all in the last six years?"

"Not a bit. He was as tall six years ago as he is today. I think that his abnormal growth might have had something to do with the stunting of his mind. But I don't know for sure."

I had to take Steve's place on the tar distributer during the next four days, and I watched Shadow pretty closely. He never ate any lunch, but he would sit with us while we devoured ours. Juggy could not resist the temptation to joke at his expense.

"There was a ghost back in my home town," Juggy once told him. "Mary Jenkens was an awful pretty woman when she was living, and when she was a girl, every fellow in town wanted to marry her. Jim Jenkens finally led her down the aisle, and we was all jealous—especially Joe Garver. He was broke up awful. Mary hadn't no more'n come back from the Falls when Joe was trying to make up to her. She wouldn't have nothing to do with him. Joe was hurt bad.

"A year after she was married, Mary took sick and died. Jim Jenkens was awful put out about it. He didn't act right from then on. He got to imagining things. He got suspicious of Joe.

" 'What you got to worry about?' people would ask him. 'Mary's dead. There can't no harm come to her now.'

"But Jim didn't feel that way. Joe heard about it, and he got to teasing Jim.

" 'I was out with Mary's ghost last night,' he would say. And Jim got to believing him. One night, he lays low for Joe and shoots him with both barrels. 'He was goin' to meet my wife!' Jim told the judge."

"Did they give him the chair?" I asked.

"No, they gave him life in the state hospital."

Shadow remained impervious to Juggy's yarns, which were told for his special benefit. During this time, I noticed something decidedly strange about the boy, but I kept my own counsel. After all, a contractor can not keep the respect of his men if he appears too credulous.

One day Juggy voiced my suspicions for me. "You know," he said, "I never saw that kid sweat. It's uncanny. It's ninety in the shade today, and Shadow ain't got a drop of perspiration on his face. Look at his shirt. Dry as if he'd just put it on."

Everyone in the crew noticed this. I think we all became uneasy in Shadow's presence.

ONE morning he didn't show up for work. We waited a few minutes and left without him. When the trucks came in with their second load of gravel, the drivers told us that Shadow's mother had died during the night. This news cast a gloom over the crew. We all sympathized with the youth.

"I wish I hadn't kidded him," said Juggy.

We all put in an appearance that evening at Shadow's little cottage, and I think he was tremendously gratified. "I won't be working no more," he told me. "There ain't no need for me now."

I couldn't afford to lay off the crew for the funeral, but I did go myself. I even accompanied Shadow to the cemetery.

We watched while the grave was being filled. There were many others there, for one of the chief delights in a rural community is to see how the mourners "take on" at a funeral. Moreover, their interest in Karl Rand was deeper. He had said he was going back to his cave, that he would never again walk by day. The villagers, as well as myself, wanted to see what would happen.

When the grave was filled, Shadow turned to me, eyed me pathetically a moment, then walked from the grave. Silently, we watched him set out across the field. Two mischievous boys disobeyed the entreaties of their parents, and set out after him.

They returned to the village an hour later with a strange and incredible story. They had seen Karl disappear into the ground. The earth had literally swallowed him up. The youngsters were terribly frightened. It was thought that Karl had done something to scare them, and their imaginations had got the better of them.

But the next day they were asked to lead a group of the more curious to the spot where Karl had vanished. He had not returned, and they were worried.

In a ravine two miles from the village, the party discovered a small but penetrable entrance to a cave. Its existence had never been dreamed of by the farmer who owned the land. (He has since then opened it up for tourists, and it is known as Ghost Cave.)

Someone in the party had thoughtfully brought an electric searchlight, and the party squeezed its way into the cave. Exploration revealed a labyrinth of caverns of exquisite beauty. But the explorers were oblivious to the esthetics of the cave; they thought only of Karl and his weird story.

After circuitous ramblings, they came to a sudden drop in the floor. At the base of this precipice they beheld a skeleton.

The coroner and the sheriff were duly summoned. The sheriff invited me to accompany him.

I regret that I can not describe the gruesome, awesome feeling that came over me as I made my way through those caverns. Within their chambers the human voice is given a peculiar, sepulchral sound. But perhaps it was the knowledge of Karl's bizarre story, his unaccountable disappearance that inspired me with such awe, such thoughts.

The skeleton gave me a shock, for it was a skeleton of a man *seven feet tall!* There was no mistake about this; the coroner was positive.

The skull had been fractured, apparently by a fall over the bank. It was I who discovered the hat near by. It was rotted with decay, but in the leather band were plainly discernible the crudely penned initials, "K. R."

I felt suddenly weak. The sheriff noticed my nervousness. "What's the matter, have you seen a ghost?"

I laughed nervously and affected nonchalance. With the best off-hand manner I could command, I told him of Karl Rand. He was not impressed.

"You don't——?" He did not wish to insult my intelligence by finishing his question.

At this moment, the coroner looked up

and commented: "This skeleton has been here about six years, I'd say."

I was not courageous enough to acknowledge my suspicions, but the villagers were outspoken. The skeleton, they declared, was that of Karl Rand. The coroner and the sheriff were incredulous, but, politicians both, they displayed some sympathy with this view.

My friend, the sheriff, discussed the matter privately with me some days later. His theory was that Karl had discovered the cave, wandered inside and come upon the corpse of some unfortunate who had preceded him. He had been so excited by his discovery that his hat had fallen down beside the body. Later, aided by the remarks of the villagers about his ghostliness, he had fashioned his own legend.

This, of course, may be true. But the people of Friedenburg are not convinced by this explanation, and neither am I. For the identity of the skeleton has never been determined, and Karl Rand has never since been seen to walk by day.

Maese Pèrez, the Organist*

By GUSTAVO ADOLFO BECQUER

"DO YOU see that man with the scarlet cloak and the white plume in his hat and the gold-embroidered vest? I mean the one just getting out of his litter and going to greet that lady — the one coming along after those four pages who are carrying torches? Well, that is the Marquis of Mascoso, lover of the widow, the Countess of Villapineda. They say that before he began paying court to her he had sought the hand of a very wealthy man's daughter, but the girl's father, who they say is a trifle close-fisted — but hush! Speaking of the devil—do you see that man closely wrapped in his cloak coming on foot under the arch of San Felipe? Well, he is the father in question. Everybody in Seville knows him on account of his immense fortune.

"Look—look at that group of stately men! They are the twenty-four knights. Aha! there's that Fleming, too. They

*Translated from the Spanish.

say that the gentlemen of the green cross have not challenged him yet, thanks to his influence with the great ones at Madrid. All he comes to church for is to hear the music.

"Alas! neighbor, that looks bad. I fear there's going to be a scuffle. I shall take refuge in the church, for, according to my guess, there will be more blows than *Paternosters*. Look, look! the Duke of Alcalá's people are coming round the corner of Saint Peter's Square, and I think I see the Duke of Medinasidonia's men in Dueñas Alley. Didn't I tell you? There—there! The blows are beginning. Neighbor, neighbor, this way before they close the doors!

"But what's that? They've left off. What's that light? Torches! a litter! It's the Bishop himself! God preserve him in his office as many centuries as I desire to live myself! If it were not for him, half Seville would have been burned up by this time with these quarrels of the dukes. Look at them, look at them, the hypocrites, how they both press forward to kiss the Bishop's ring!

"But come, neighbor—come into the church before it is packed full. Some nights like this it is so crowded that you couldn't get in if you were no larger than a grain of wheat. The nuns have a prize in their organist. Other sisterhoods have made Maese Pérez magnificent offers; nothing strange about that, though, for the very Archbishop has offered him mountains of gold if he would go to the cathedral. But he would not listen to them. He would sooner die than give up his beloved organ. You don't know Maese Pérez? Oh, I forgot you had just come to the neighborhood. Well, he is a holy man; poor, to be sure, but as charitable as any man that ever lived. With no relative but a daughter, and no friend but his organ, he spends all his time in caring for the one and repairing the other. The organ is an old affair, you must know; but that makes no difference to him. He handles it so that its tone is a wonder. How he does know it! and all by touch, too, for did I tell you that the poor man was born blind?

"Humble, too, as the very stones. He always says that he is only a poor convent organist, when the fact is he could give lessons in *sol fa* to the very chapel-master of the Primate. You see, he began before he had teeth. His father had the same position before him, and as the boy showed such talent, it was very natural that he should succeed his father when the latter died. And what a touch he has, God bless him! He always plays well, always; but on a night like this he is wonderful. He has the greatest devotion to this Christmas Eve mass, and when the host is elevated, precisely at twelve o'clock, which is the time that Our Lord came into the world, his organ sounds like the voices of angels.

"But why need I try to tell you about what you are going to hear tonight? It is enough for you to see that all the elegance of Seville, the very Archbishop included, comes to a humble convent to listen to him. And it is not only the learned people who can understand his skill that come; the common people, too, swarm to the church, and are as still as the dead when Maese Pérez puts his hands to the organ. And when the host is elevated, then you can hear a fly. Great tears fall from every eye, and when the music is over a long-drawn sigh is heard, showing how the people have been holding their breath all through.

"But come, come, the bells have stopped ringing, and the mass is going to begin. Hurry in. This is Christmas Eve for everybody, but for no one is it a greater occasion than for us."

So saying, the good woman who had been acting as cicerone for her neighbor pressed through the portico of the Convent of Santa Inés, and elbowing this one and pushing the other, succeeded in getting inside the church, forcing her way through the multitude that was crowding about the door.

II

THE church was profusely lighted. The flood of light which fell from the altars glanced from the rich jewels of the great ladies, who, kneeling upon velvet cushions placed before them by pages, and taking their prayer-books from the hands of female attendants, formed a brilliant circle around the chancel lattice. Standing next that lattice, wrapped in their richly colored and embroidered cloaks, letting their green and red orders be seen with studied carelessness, holding in one hand their hats, the plumes sweeping the floor, and letting the other rest upon the polished hilts of rapiers or jeweled handles of daggers, the twenty-four knights, and a large part of the highest nobility of Seville, seemed to be forming a wall for the purpose of keeping their wives and daughters from contact with the populace. The latter, swaying back and forth at the rear of the nave, with a noise like that of a rising surf, broke out into joyous acclamations as the Archbishop was seen to come in. That dignitary seated himself near the high altar under a scarlet canopy, surrounded by his attendants, and three times blessed the people.

It was time for the mass to begin.

Nevertheless, several minutes passed before the celebrant appeared. The multitude began to murmur impatiently; the knights exchanged words with one another in a low tone; and the Archbishop sent one of his attendants to the sacristan to inquire why the ceremony did not begin.

"Maese Pérez has fallen sick, very sick, and it will be impossible for him to come to the midnight mass."

This was the word brought back by the attendant.

The news ran instantly through the crowd. The disturbance caused by it was so great that the chief judge rose to his feet, and the officers came into the church, to enforce silence.

Just then a man of unpleasant face, thin, bony, and cross-eyed too, pushed up to the place where the Archbishop was sitting.

"Maese Pérez is sick," he said; "the ceremony can not begin. If you see fit, I will play the organ in his absence. Maese Pérez is not the best organist in the world, nor need this instrument be left unused after his death for lack of anyone able to play it."

The Archbishop nodded his head in assent, although some of the faithful, who had already recognized in that strange person an envious rival of the organist of Santa Inés, were breaking out in cries of displeasure. Suddenly a surprizing noise was heard in the portico.

"Maese Pérez is here! Maese Pérez is here!"

At this shout, coming from those jammed in by the door, everyone looked around.

Maese Pérez, pale and feeble, was in fact entering the church, brought in a chair which all were quarreling for the honor of carrying upon their shoulders.

The commands of the physicians, the tears of his daughter—nothing had been able to keep him in bed.

"No," he had said; "this is the last one, I know it. I know it, and I do not want to die without visiting my organ again, this night above all, this Christmas

Eve. Come, I desire it, I order it; come, to the church!"

His desire had been gratified. The people carried him in their arms to the organ-loft. The mass began.

Twelve struck on the cathedral clock.

The introit came, then the Gospel, then the offertory, and the moment arrived when the priest, after consecrating the sacred water, took it in his hands and began to elevate it. A cloud of incense filled the church in bluish undulations. The little bells rang out in vibrating peals, and Maese Pérez placed his aged fingers upon the organ keys.

The multitudinous voices of the metal tubes gave forth a prolonged and majestic chord, which died away little by little, as if a gentle breeze had borne away its last echoes.

To this opening burst, which seemed like a voice lifted up to heaven from earth, responded a sweet and distant note, which went on swelling and swelling in volume until it became a torrent of overpowering harmony. It was the voice of the angels, traversing space, and reaching the world.

Then distant hymns began to be heard, intoned by the hierarchies of seraphim; a thousand hymns at once, mingling to form a single one, though this one was only an accompaniment to a strange melody which seemed to float above that ocean of mysterious echoes, like a strip of fog above the waves of the sea.

One song after another died away. The movement grew simpler. Now only two voices were heard, whose echoes blended. Then but one remained, and alone sustained a note as brilliant as a thread of light. The priest bowed his face, and above his gray head appeared the host. At that moment the note which Maese Pérez was holding began to swell, and swell, and an explosion of unspeakable joy filled the church.

From each of the notes forming that magnificent chord, a theme was developed; and some near, others far away, these brilliant, those muffled, one would have said that the waters and the birds, the breezes and the forests, men and angels, earth and heaven, were singing, each in its own language, a hymn in praise of the Savior's birth.

The people listened, amazed and breathless. The officiating priest felt his hands trembling; for it seemed as if he had seen the heavens opened and the host transfigured.

The organ kept on, but its voice sank away gradually, like a tone going from echo to echo, and dying as it goes. Suddenly a cry was heard in the organ-loft —a piercing, shrill cry, the cry of a woman.

The organ gave a strange, discordant sound, like a sob, and then was silent.

The multitude flocked to the stairs leading up to the organ-loft, toward which the anxious gaze of the faithful was turned.

"What has happened? What is the matter?" one asked another, and no one knew what to reply. The confusion increased. The excitement threatened to disturb the good order and decorum fitting within a church.

"What was that?" asked the great ladies of the chief judge. He had been one of the first to ascend to the organ-loft. Now, pale and displaying signs of deep grief, he was going to the Archbishop, who was anxious, like everybody else, to know the cause of the disturbance.

"What's the matter?"

"Maese Pérez has just expired."

In fact, when the first of the faithful rushed up the stairway and reached the

organ-loft, they saw the poor organist fallen face down upon the keys of his old instrument, which was still vibrating, while his daughter, kneeling at his feet, was vainly calling to him with tears and sobs.

3

"Good evening, my dear Doña Baltasara. Are you also going tonight to the Christmas Eve mass? For my part, I was intending to go to the parish church to hear it, but what has happened—where is Vicente going, do you ask? Why, where the crowd goes. And, I must say, to tell the truth, that ever since Maese Pérez died it seems as if a marble slab was on my heart whenever I go to Santa Inés. Poor dear man! He was a saint! I know one thing—I keep a piece of his cloak as a relic, and he deserves it. I solemnly believe that if the Archbishop would stir in the matter, our grandchildren would see his image among the saints on the altars. But, of course, he won't do that. The dead and absent have no friends, as they say. It's all the latest thing, nowadays; you understand me. What? You do not know what has happened? Well, it's true you are not exactly in our situation. From our house to the church, and from the church to our house—a word here and another one there—on the wing—without any curiosity whatever—I easily find out all the news.

"Well, then, it's a settled thing that the organist of San Roman—that squint-eye, who is always slandering other organists—that great blunderer, who seems more like a butcher than a master of *sol fa*—is going to play this Christmas Eve in Maese Pérez's old place. Of course, you know, for everybody knows it, and it is a public matter in all Seville, that no one dared to try it. His daughter herself would not, though she is a professor of music herself. After her father's death she went into the convent as a novice. Her unwillingness to play was the most natural thing in the world; accustomed as she was to those marvelous performances, any other playing must have appeared bad to her, not to speak of her desire to avoid comparisons. But when the sisterhood had already decided that in honor of the dead organist, and as a token of respect to his memory, the organ should not be played tonight, here comes this fellow along, and says that he is ready to play it.

"Ignorance is the boldest of all things. It is true, the fault is not his, so much as theirs who have consented to this profanation, but that is the way of the world. But, I say, there's no small bit of people coming. Anyone would say that nothing had changed since last year. The same distinguished persons, the same elegant costumes, the crowding at the door, the same excitement in the portico, the same throng in the church. Alas! if the dead man were to rise, he would feel like dying again to hear his organ played by inferior hands. The fact is, if what the people of the neighborhood tell me is true, they are getting a fine reception ready for the intruder. When the time comes for him to touch the keys, there is going to break out a racket made by timbrels, drums, and horse-fiddles, so that you can't hear anything else. But hush! there's the hero of the occasion going into the church. Goodness! what gaudy clothes, what a neck-cloth, what a high and mighty air! Come, hurry up, the Archbishop came only a moment ago, and the mass is going to begin. Come on; I guess this night will give us something to talk about for many a day!"

Saying this, the worthy woman, whom the reader recognizes by her abrupt talkativeness, went into the Church of Santa

Inés, opening for herself a path, in her usual way, by shoving and elbowing through the crowd.

THE ceremony had already begun. The church was as brilliant as the year before.

The new organist, after passing between the rows of the faithful in the nave, and going to kiss the Archbishop's ring, had gone up to the organ-loft, where he was trying one stop of the organ after another, with an affected and ridiculous gravity.

A low, confused noise was heard coming from the common people clustered at the rear of the church, a sure augury of the coming storm, which would not be long in breaking.

"He is a mere clown," said some, "who does not know how to do anything, not even look straight."

"He is an ignoramus," said others, "who, after having made a perfect rattle out of the organ in his own church, comes here to profane Maese Pérez's."

And while one was taking off his cloak so as to be ready to beat his drum to good advantage, and another was testing his timbrel, and all were more and more buzzing out in talk, only here and there could one be found to defend even feebly that curious person, whose proud and pedantic bearing so strongly contrasted with the modest appearance and kind affability of Maese Pérez.

At last the looked-for moment arrived, when the priest, after bowing low and murmuring the sacred words, took the host in his hands. The bells gave forth a peal, like a rain of crystal notes; the transparent waves of incense rose, and the organ sounded.

But its first chord was drowned by a horrible clamor which filled the whole church. Bagpipes, horns, timbrels, drums, every instrument known to the populace, lifted up their discordant voices all at once.

The confusion and clangor lasted but a few seconds. As the noises began, so they ended, all together.

The second chord, full, bold, magnificent, sustained itself, pouring from the organ's metal tubes like a cascade of inexhaustible and sonorous harmony.

Celestial songs like those that caress the ear in moments of ecstasy; songs which the soul perceives, but which the lips can not repeat; single notes of a distant melody, which sound at intervals, borne on the breeze; the rustle of leaves kissing each other on the trees with a murmur like rain; trills of larks which rise with quivering songs from among the flowers like a flight of arrows to the sky; nameless sounds, overwhelming as the roar of a tempest; fluttering hymns, which seemed to be mounting to the throne of the Lord like a mixture of light and sound—all were expressed by the organ's hundred voices, with more vigor, more subtle poetry, more weird coloring, than had ever been known before.

WHEN the organist came down from the loft the crowd which pressed up to the stairway was so great, and their eagerness to see and greet him so intense, that the chief judge, fearing, and not without reason, that he would be suffocated among them all, ordered some of the officers to open a path for the organist with their staves of office, so that he could reach the high altar, where the prelate was waiting for him.

"You perceive," said the Archbishop, "that I have come all the way from my palace to hear you. Now, are you going to be as cruel as Maese Pérez? He would never save me the journey, by going to play the Christmas Eve mass in the cathedral."

"Next year," replied the organist, "I promise to give you the pleasure; since, for all the gold in the world, I would never play this organ again."

"But why not?" interrupted the prelate.

"Because," returned the organist, endeavoring to repress the agitation which revealed itself in the pallor of his face—"because it is so old and poor; one can not express one's self on it satisfactorily."

The Archbishop withdrew, followed by his attendants. One after another the litters of the great folk disappeared in the windings of the neighboring streets. The group in the portico scattered.

The sexton was locking up the doors, when two women were perceived, who had stopped to cross themselves and mutter a prayer, and who were now going on their way into Dueñas Alley.

"What would you have, my dear Doña Baltasara?" one was saying. "That's the way I am. Every crazy person with his whim. The barefooted Capuchins might assure me that it was so, and I would not believe it. That man never played what we have heard. Why, I have heard him a thousand times in San Bartolomé, his parish church; the priest had to send him away, he was so poor a player. You felt like plugging your ears with cotton. Why, all you need is to look at his face, and that is the mirror of the soul, they say. I remember, as if I was seeing him now, poor man—I remember Maese Pérez's face, nights like this, when he came down from the organ-loft, after having entranced the audience with his splendors. What a gracious smile! What a happy glow on his face! Old as he was, he seemed like an angel. But this creature came plunging down as if a dog were barking at him on the landing, and all the color of a dead man, while his—come, dear Doña Baltasara, believe me, and believe what I say: there is some great mystery about this."

Thus conversing, the two women turned the corner of the alley, and disappeared. There is no need of saying who one of them was.

4

ANOTHER year had gone by. The abbess of the Convent of Santa Inés and Maese Pérez's daughter were talking in a low voice, half hidden in the shadows of the church choir. The penetrating voice of the bell was summoning the faithful. A very few people were passing through the portico, silent and deserted, this year, and after taking holy water at the door, were choosing seats in a corner of the nave, where a handful of residents of the neighborhood were quietly waiting for the Christmas Eve mass to begin.

"There, you see," the mother superior was saying, "your fear is entirely childish; there is no one in the church. All Seville is trooping to the cathedral tonight. Play the organ, and do it without any distrust whatever. We are only a sisterhood here. But why don't you speak? What has happened? What is the matter with you?"

"I am afraid," replied the girl, in a tone of the deepest agitation.

"Afraid! Of what?"

"I do not know—something supernatural. Listen to what happened last night. I had heard you say that you were anxious for me to play the organ for the mass. I was proud of the honor, and I thought I would arrange the stops and get the organ in good tune so as to give you a surprize today. Alone I went into the choir and opened the door leading to the organ-loft. The cathedral clock was striking just then, I do not know what hour; but the strokes of the bell were

very mournful, and they were very numerous, sounding on for a century, as it seemed to me, while I stood as if nailed to the threshold.

"The church was empty and dark. Far away there gleamed a feeble light, like a faint star in the sky; it was the lamp burning on the high altar. By its flickering light, which only helped to make the deep horror of the shadows the more intense, I saw—I saw—mother, do not disbelieve it—a man. In perfect silence, and with his back toward me, he was running over the organ-keys with one hand while managing the stops with the other. And the organ sounded, but in an indescribable manner. It seemed as if each note were a sob smothered in the metal tube, which vibrated under the pressure of the air compressed within it, and gave forth a low, almost imperceptible tone, yet exact and true.

"The cathedral clock kept on striking, and that man kept on running over the keys. I could hear his very breathing.

"Fright had frozen the blood in my veins. My body was as cold as ice, except my head, and that was burning. I tried to cry out, but I could not. That man turned his face and looked at me—no, he did not look at me, for he was blind. It was my father!"

"Nonsense, sister! Banish these fancies with which the devil endeavors to overturn weak imaginations. Address a *Paternoster* and an *Ave Maria* to the archangel, Saint Michael, the captain of the celestial hosts, that he may aid you in opposing evil spirits. Wear on your neck a scapulary which has been pressed to the relics of Saint Pacomio, the counsellor against temptations, and go, go quickly, and sit at the organ. The mass is going to begin, and the faithful are growing impatient. Your father is in heaven, and thence, instead of giving you a fright, will descend to inspire his daughter in the solemn service."

The prioress went to occupy her seat in the choir in the midst of the sisterhood. Maese Pérez's daughter opened the door of the organ-loft with trembling hand, and sat down at the organ.

The mass began, and went on without anything unusual happening until the time of consecration came. Then the organ sounded. At the same time came a scream from Maese Pérez's daughter.

The mother superior, the nuns, and some of the faithful rushed up to the organ-loft.

"Look at him!—look at him!" cried the girl, fixing her eyes, staring from their sockets, upon the seat, from which she had risen in terror. She was clinging with convulsed hands to the railing of the organ-loft.

Everybody looked intently at the spot to which she directed her gaze. No one was at the organ, yet it went on sounding—sounding like the songs of the archangels in their bursts of mystic ecstasy.

3

"DIDN'T I tell you a thousand times, if I did once, dear Doña Baltasara—didn't I tell you? What! didn't you go last night to the Christmas Eve mass? Well, you must know, anyhow, what happened. Nothing else is talked about in the whole city. The Archbishop is furious, and no wonder. Not to have gone to Santa Inés, not to have been present at the miracle—and all to hear a wretched clatter! That's all the inspired organist of San Bartolomé made in the cathedral, so persons who heard him tell me. Yes, I said so all the time. The squint-eye never could have played that. It was all a lie. There is some great mystery here. What do I think it was? Why, it was the soul of Maese Pérez."

THE EYRIE

AN EDITOR'S life contains much routine work and a good deal of drudgery, but there are many compensations. One of these is the occasional privilege of uncovering new authors. WEIRD TALES in the past has discovered a goodly number of new writers with real talent. Some of these have gone far in the world of letters. But it is rare indeed to find such universal acclaim, for the work of a hitherto unknown writer, as you, the readers of this magazine, have accorded to C. L. Moore. *Shambleau*, in the November WEIRD TALES, evoked a chorus of praise, and was recognized as a truly different and truly great contribution to weird literature. And the applause for this author's second story, *Black Thirst* (in the April issue), was even more emphatic. We do not yet know how C. L. Moore's third story, *Scarlet Dream*, will appear to you, the readers, because the May issue is not yet on sale as these lines are written; but we know that you will receive with pleasure the announcement that a fourth story by this author, *Dust of Gods*, will appear in our pages soon.

In Love With Northwest Smith

Sylvia Bennett, of Detroit, writes to the Eyrie: "Northwest Smith has become my idol in WEIRD TALES. Believe it or not, I've fallen passionately in love with him. There is a character for you! Warm, human, lovable and incredibly realistic. No barbarian baboon hot-head, this one, who slices off human and unhuman heads on the slightest pretext; nor snarls and growls at his girl-friends; nor socks his dames with such manly toughness as would make Clark Gable and Jimmy Cagney look like sissies in comparison. It is certain C. L. Moore is destined to become a popular WEIRD TALES author. Although *Black Thirst* did not reach the high standard of *Shambleau*, still it was an excellent job, weirdly and thrillingly beautiful. I give it first place in the April issue, and my second choice to *Satan's Garden* by E. Hoffmann Price."

In Appreciation of C. L. Moore

Mrs. Wendell Cox, of Sawtelle, California, writes: "I have been reading WEIRD TALES for seven years, and feel that I must congratulate you on the April number. It is a knockout. C. L. Moore, author of *Shambleau* and *Black Thirst*, is the best writer you ever had. His stuff is outstanding, distinctive, adult and fascinating. Anyone with imagination would enjoy his stories. . . . As to nudity on the covers, I think we can stand it as long as it is not suggestive or obscene in effect. Nakedness handled in a certain way is graceful and beautiful, where the same subject handled in a different way is nasty. I read WEIRD TALES with great enjoyment, and wish it came out twice a month instead of monthly."

C. L. Moore Not a Pen Name

Donald Allgeier, of Springfield, Missouri, writes: "This letter is written primarily because of *Black Thirst*. I have a thirst (black or not) for more like it. I hope the next story by Moore is as good as this. . . . Who is C. L. Moore, anyway? Surely he's not a brand-new author—not when he can write as he does. Could he perhaps be a new pseudonym for some famous writer? I thought he had just about reached the ultimate in his first story, but the second proved my mistake. Most authors would carefully avoid description of all those beautiful girls,

(Please turn to page 778)

Coming Next Month

I WILL not harrow your feelings by describing the sight which finally met my eyes. Sufficient to say that the explosion had expended its force downward, in precisely the same manner as dynamite does. The whole of the lower portion of his body had been blown to atoms, but the upper part of his chest, his arms and head, were comparatively uninjured. One look was enough! I snapped off my flashlight and fled. . . .

You can well imagine the eagerness with which I scanned the first newspapers I could get hold of. But there was no account in the morning paper of a mutilated body being found, nor in the next morning's, nor the next. As the days lengthened into weeks without a single hint of the tragedy, my relief gave place to wonder, and finally to a vague, nameless fear. Had I not seen the uninjured half of Jake's body lying in the roadway, I should have dismissed the matter with the assumption that it had been completely destroyed by the explosion. Such an object could not remain unnoticed in the public highway for any length of time. It must have been removed on the same night when the tragedy occurred. But by whom? And for what purpose? But as the months went by without a single hint or rumor of the affair being brought to light, my fears became lulled into a sense of security. Whether his remains were above ground or below, Crazy Jake was dead and unrecognizable by this time, I argued with myself, and his secret had perished with him. My fears slept so soundly that the rude shock of their awakening almost unsettled my reason.

It happened like this:—It was a night in winter, six months after the affair that I have just described. It was intensely cold, and the snow lay thick upon the ground. But I was cozy enough, sitting in my easy-chair in front of a roaring fire in the library of Moor Lodge, with my pipe alight and a recently published scientific volume on my lap. A faint fumbling sound at the window made me glance up, and the moment I rested my eyes on the casement I felt my limbs grow stiff with stark, paralyzing terror.

Gazing fixedly at me through the glass, his face and figure clear and unmistakable in the bright rays of the moon, was Crazy Jake—the man whom I had last seen a hideously maimed corpse, blown literally in halves by the terrible fulminator whose secret he had been about to betray! . . .

Don't miss this astounding weird mystery novel, of strange death on the desolate Moor of Exham, and the mysterious creature known as "The Terror of the Moor." This startling story will begin in WEIRD TALES for July:

THE TRAIL OF THE CLOVEN HOOF

By ARLTON EADIE

——ALSO——

THROUGH THE GATES OF THE SILVER KEY

By H. P. LOVECRAFT *and* E. HOFFMANN PRICE

A veritable *tour de force* of the imagination, one of the most brilliant stories ever written, cosmic in its scope, by two of the greatest writers of weird fiction in the world today.

THE MASTER OF SOULS

By HAROLD WARD

A gripping tale of a Satanist, to whom murder was a commonplace and who wallowed in human misery.

THE ILLUSION OF FLAME

By PAUL ERNST

A withered stranger from far-off Tibet showed the Great Caprini a bit of terrible magic that made his blood run cold in his veins.

THE THUNDERSTONES OF NUFLO

By RALPH ALLEN LANG

A grim story of Haitian Voodoo, of revivified corpses, and the gruesome death that stalked the deck of the yacht *Oberon*.

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(Continued from page 776)

but Moore handles it beautifully, delicately, and marvelously. The Alendar, too, is a worthy creation. I'd like to see a novel by Moore. Hamilton was not quite so good this month; his *Thundering Worlds* was better. Howard and Jacobi sure deliver the goods. Clark's short was pretty deep, but plenty weird. Price's new story satisfies. . . . Recent investigation relative to the Rub al Khali desert and Sheba's mythical capital makes interesting reading to one who is acquainted with Williamson's *Golden Blood*, which ran in WEIRD TALES a year ago." [C. L. Moore is a new writer. The name is not a pseudonym, but is the author's real name.—THE EDITOR.]

WT Is Getting Better

Arthur S. Doan, of Fort Wayne, Indiana, writes: "I have been a reader of your splendid magazine for more than ten years, having purchased my first copy during the summer of 1923 while on a vacation. All the changes since that time have improved the magazine. I read a great deal, both fiction and non-fiction, but I get more pleasure from reading WT than anything else. The Eyrie is always interesting, but this is the first time I have written to the editor of any magazine. While many of the stories in the old numbers were masterpieces, I believe the magazine has more good stories per issue now than in 'the good old days.' The April issue surely leaves very little room for improvement. I believe it is the best number I have read. My choice for first place among the stories in this number goes to *Black Thirst* by C. L. Moore; for second place *The Death of Malygris* by Clark Ashton Smith; and for third place *Shadows in the Moonlight* by Robert E. Howard. . . . Some years ago I read a story in WT about a gigantic armored bird which made trips between this planet and another one. It was one of your greatest stories, but I have forgotten the title of it. What has happened to Greye la Spina? It has been a long time since a story by her has appeared in WT. I always considered her one of your best contributors." [The story about which you inquire is *The Bird of Space*, by Everil Worrell, which appeared in WEIRD TALES for September, 1926. We may reprint this story. As to Greye la Spina, we share your enthusiasm for her stories. You will be pleased to learn that we shall soon publish a new story by Mrs. La Spina: *The Sinister Painting*.—THE EDITOR.]

Satan's Garden

Alvin Earl Perry, of Rockdale, Texas, writes to the Eyrie: "Congratulations! You have secured a masterpiece of fantastic literature in E. Hoffmann Price's two-part serial, *Satan's Garden*, and I can hardly wait for the concluding installment. As usual, Conan provided some real thrills in Robert E. Howard's story, *Shadows in the Moonlight*. In my humble opinion Conan is the greatest of WT's famous characters; although this new hero, Northwest Smith, in C. L. Moore's stories, isn't far behind. . . . Clark Ashton Smith can certainly sling words, as shown in *The Death of Malygris* in the present issue. And he is an artist, too—what a man!"

About Those Cover Designs

John G. Whitcomb writes to the Eyrie from the University of Virginia: "I beg to differ with Miss Mary Whitcomb's opinion of your cover designs. Why have such erotic material for your covers? You certainly do not claim to be that type of periodical, and you could therefore offer no attractions to the type of man or woman who reads that type of magazine. And for those of us who would read your periodical, a cover of that nature can very easily subject the reader to an immense quantity of rather boring humor."

In Defense of Brundage

Charles William Brock, Jr., of El Paso, Texas, writes: "Since I first started reading WEIRD TALES in 1923 I have followed the Eyrie with interest but have never participated before. Since, however, the controversy over covers seems to go on and on, let me add my voice to the general clamor and cast my vote for the female beauty that a few misguided souls seem to object to so strenuously. I do not think it would be at all an easy task to find anything to compare with Brundage's representations of sheer feminine loveliness without the touch of vulgarity and suggestiveness which usually accompany nudes in magazines. The cover illustrating *Black Colossus* was about as beautiful a piece

(Please turn to page 780)

BACK COPIES

Because of the many requests for back issues of WEIRD TALES, the publishers do their best to keep a sufficient supply on hand to meet all demands. This magazine was established in early 1923 and there has been a steady drain on the supply of back copies ever since. At present, we have the following back numbers on hand for sale:

1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934
Jan.	Jan.	----	Jan.	Jan.	Jan.	Jan.
----	----	----	Feb.-Mar.	Feb.	Feb.	Feb.
Mar.	Mar.	----		----	Mar.	Mar.
Apr.	Apr.	----	Apr.-May	Apr.	Apr.	Apr.
----	May	----		----	May	May
June	June	----	Jun.-Jul.	June	June	----
July	July	July		July	July	----
Aug.	----	----	Aug.	Aug.	Aug.	----
Sept.	----	----	----	Sept.	Sept.	----
Oct.	----	----	Oct.	Oct.	Oct.	----
Nov.	----	----	Nov.	Nov.	Nov.	----
Dec.	----	Dec.	----	Dec.	Dec.	----

These back numbers contain many fascinating stories. If you are interested in obtaining any of the back copies on this list please hurry your order because we can not guarantee that the list will be as complete as it now is within the next 30 days. The price on all back issues is 25c per copy. Mail all orders to:

WEIRD TALES

840 N. Michigan Ave. Chicago, Illinois

(Continued from page 778)

of art as I have seen in a long time. As near as my meager knowledge can inform me, one of the synonyms for weird is unearthly, and surely a story laid on another planet or out in the dim reaches of space could be classed as decidedly unearthly. So by all means keep the interplanetary stories. But it would be a help if you would whisper in Hamilton's ear, and ask him if he couldn't search diligently around in the immensities of his fertile brain and dig up another plot besides the old favorite of alien-creatures-invading-universe-heroes-drive-them-away type. Once in a while he comes across with something else and it is invariably good. Since it seems to be fashionable to express likes and dislikes, let me start with *Black Thirst*, closely followed by *The Death of Malygris*, with Smith's inevitable vein of sardonic humor, and Howard's *Shadows in the Moonlight*. Price's new serial promises to be good, and I am glad to see that it will only be a two-part serial instead of dragging on for so long that by the time you read the last part you have forgotten the first."

Where Is Jules de Grandin?

Harold F. Keating, of Quincy, Massachusetts, writes to the Eyrie: "I have only one protest to register at this time, and that is, 'What has become of Seabury Quinn and Jules de Grandin?' A story by Quinn seems as much a part of the magazine as the cover. Your new author, C. L. Moore, author of *Black Thirst* and *Shambleau*, has become one of my favorites already, ranking with Clark Ashton Smith, Edmond Hamilton, Seabury Quinn and H. P. Lovecraft. . . . I have before me a list of fifty-three serials I have read in WEIRD TALES, and the best two are *The Black Monarch* by Paul Ernst and *The Devil's Bride* by Seabury Quinn." [You will be pleased to learn that Jules de Grandin will shortly appear as the hero of another fine story by Seabury Quinn in this magazine.—THE EDITOR.]

Two Boosts and a Knock

Donald A. Wollheim, of New York City, writes: "Congratulations on finding a writer equal to Merritt or Lovecraft. I refer to C. L. Moore. His *Black Thirst* is better even than *Shambleau*, and I thought the latter was one of the most excellent stories I ever read in your magazine. If he can keep it up it will be the greatest thing ever for WEIRD TALES. He has a way of writing and an attitude about life on other worlds that few possess. When man finally does reach out to other planets he will undoubtedly go through experiences and find things weirder and stranger and more inexplicable than anything ever written or conceived of. Moore gets closer to this feeling than any other writer. I was sorely disappointed in Edmond Hamilton's *Corsairs of the Cosmos*. It is the worst thing he ever put down on paper. When the readers said they wanted Interstellar Patrol stories we meant just what we said. I for one refuse to accept the bone that was just tossed us. It comes too close to Mr. Leonard's devastating comment. The chief item of weirdness and interest about the Interstellar stories is the characters. The utterly strange idea of a single human being part of a crew of insect men, plant men, bat men and the other members of the Federation of Suns is what enthralls one. The idea of flying about among all the stars of the heavens with freedom to see the myriad strange civilizations there is what holds one. *Corsairs of the Cosmos* lacked all of this. Its characters had no personality. We knew not whether they were just ordinary humans or not. We saw nothing. There was only a hurried and perfunctory dry relating of events. It was definitely hard to read. We want a new story of the Suns and we want a good one in the OLD style. Get to work, Mr. Hamilton. Seriously, this time. . . . By the way, a few months ago, you mentioned that you were surprized that there was no comment on a certain story which you thought would receive a lot. Was this story *The Cat Woman*, by Mary E. Counselman? If it was, then I share your appreciation. I thought it one of the most poignant and enthralling little tales it has ever been my good fortune to read." [The story we had in mind was *The House of the Worm*, by Mearle Prout, in WEIRD TALES for last October.—THE EDITOR.]

Read Next Month's Issue

Robert Leonard Russell, of Mount Vernon, Illinois, writes: "Where is Lovecraft? It has been a long, long time since a story by good old H. P. L. has graced the pages of

WT. I only live from issue to issue in hopes of seeing another Lovecraft in my favorite mag. Now for illustrations—the April cover was much too colorful for WT—it rather reminded one of the cover of a seed-catalog. Let this be a lesson—from now on use black or some other dark background. Keep Brundage, though, at all cost. . . . Why don't you reprint some of the first few issues complete? They should go like wild-fire. The *Bells of Oceana* reprint was swell—really weird. Yours for weirder weirdness." [Your question as to when we will publish another Lovecraft story is answered on page 784. Read next month's issue.—THE EDITOR.]

Smith and Howard

Claude H. Cameron, of Toronto, writes: "I give *Black Thirst* by C. L. Moore first place in an outstanding issue of superb stories. That story is all that I hoped for; in fact, it was just a little better than I expected. Howard's story was good, but it lacked a bit of the old fire. Smith's tale, *The Death of Malygris,* was a treat. I like his illustrations, as well. By the way, have you ever examined and closely compared Howard's and Smith's writings? They are astonishingly similar, yet I believe that Smith is a shade the better. . . . Dale Clark's story, *Behind the Screen,* was very well done; but don't you think that you are overdoing the theme of 'waking up and finding yourself dead'? There have been several stories lately on this plot. . . . The reprint, *Bells of Oceana,* by Arthur J. Burks, was gratefully reread. It is a truly weird tale—one of the kind that has made WT a unique magazine. About the cover—I would rather have had a scene from *Black Thirst.* I'm not a sadist and such whipping scenes do not find favor with me. Long's poem was good—I like your choice of poetry. Now why not a story by Lovecraft? I rate him as one of the triumvirate of super-authors—first, Merritt; second, Lovecraft; third, Owen. Lovecraft's last tale was a fine example of his ability to create truly weird atmosphere. That is where he excels all others. Taking it all in all, the April issue was well above the average. I congratulate you." [Our announcement page will give you news of a new Lovecraft story,

Coming Next Month

HARLOW! Is it possible for me to describe the man—if man he is? Metaphysician! Psychologist! Necromancer! Sorcerer! Delver into everything weird, mysterious, uncanny, devilish! Alchemist! Philosopher! Hydromancer! Satanist! Stealer of souls and master of ghouls! A creature utterly without human impulse—a thinker only in terms of the abstract. A man who wallows in human misery and fattens on the blood of innocent victims. A man who cares only for the soul because, he says, the soul knows not the meaning of time and because the soul alone is life and intelligence.

To him the temporal body is only a temporary dwelling-place for the soul—a thing to be discarded when worn out, as one discards an old suit of clothes or as a salamander throws off its skin in the springtime. To him death is nothing. He can not—or will not—die. He professes to believe in a God; yet he is a practitioner of the Black Mass.

Because the soul merely transfers its abiding-place from one body to another he has no regard for human life. He snaps his fingers at murder. To kill, he says, is merely to destroy the shell. The soul, he claims, never dies. . . .

Here is a story that will grip you and send shivers up your spine. You can not afford to miss this tale of the weird Horatio Harlow, who triumphed over death and became a master of ghouls. It will be published complete in the July issue of WEIRD TALES.

THE MASTER OF SOULS

By HAROLD WARD

written in collaboration with E. Hoffmann Price.—THE EDITOR.]

Those Covers Again

Rona Elizabeth Workman, of Westfir, Oregon, writes to the Eyrie: "I do enjoy WEIRD TALES and usually manage to acquire one each month, even though I do tear off the cover immediately and stick it in the nearest receptacle for trash. Are such covers absolutely necessary?"

Applause for Hamilton

Joe Deitch, of Philadelphia, writes to the Eyrie: "I just finished reading the February issue of WT and it was *swell!* The best story was *The Man Who Returned,* by Edmond Hamilton, and it sure knocked me out. Please keep on printing the good verse. Thanks a lot."

More Orchids for C. L. Moore

Captain J. Wilmer Benjamin, of Lewisburg, West Virginia, writes: "I thought Doctor Keller's story, *The Solitary Hunters,* which ended last issue, was the best super-insect story in a long time, but personally I prefer such things as *Behind the Screen,* stories that are weird and unusual, but strike us as *possible.* Of course, variety is the spice of life. For instance, I noticed that one of your readers complained—I forget the issue—about Edmond Hamilton's story of the man who came back from the tomb, only to find that he was quite unnecessary. I thought that ironic little story was excellent! And here's a bunch of orchids for C. L. Moore's *Black Thirst.* Moore certainly has made use of suspense and description. It is an excellent bit of writing."

A Hymn of Hate

Margaret St. Clair, of Berkeley, California, writes: "I've been a good quiet uncomplaining reader of WEIRD TALES for about ten years—ever since I was twelve—but the prospect of another story by Edmond Hamilton moves me to hysterical outcry. He makes me want to scream and bite my nails—'captured thirty-six suns' indeed! His style is nothing but exclamation marks; his idea of drama is something involving a fantastic number of light-speeds; he is, in the words of one of my favorite comic strip characters, flies in my soup. He is science-fiction at its worst: all WEIRD TALES needs to make the science-fiction atmosphere perfect is a letter from Forrest J. Ackerman and a story by Hamilton. Oh, and another gripe—I dislike the blurbs you are printing at the first of the stories. They are just a waste of space. I

My favorite stories in the June WEIRD TALES are:

Story	Remarks
(1)_____	_____
(2)_____	_____
(3)_____	_____

I do not like the following stories:

(1)_____ Why?_____

(2)_____ _____

It will help us to know what kind of stories you want in WEIRD TALES if you will fill out this coupon and mail it to The Eyrie, Weird Tales, 840 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

Reader's name and address:

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_____

_____

hate vampire and werewolf stories — my blood refuses to congeal for any number of undead clammily hooting about. There was a time when I could be made to shiver by the mention of garlic, but now it's just something to put in salad. Things like *Shambleau* are what I like. As long as WT prints stories by Clark Ashton Smith, however, I'll keep on reading it. His tales have a rounded jewel-like self-containedness that is, artistically, a delight. . . . And Smith's drawings are, I think, by far the best in the magazine. . . . In conclusion, Jules de Grandin is a pain in the neck."

Zowie!

B. F. Conlon, of New York City, writes to the Eyrie: "I have read your magazine for the past ten years, but I don't think I'll continue to subscribe any longer. It seems to me that you have gone far afield from the WEIRD TALES of only a few years back in that the type of stories now used are not to be compared with those of prior years. Each month you seem to be contented to give your readers one or possibly two worth-while stories. The other stories, it appears to me, are hardly worth the time taken to read them."

More Bouquets for Brundage

Edgar Lovecraft, of Martinsburg, West Virginia, writes: "Brundage is the greatest artist yet. His alien exotic use of rainbow tones is describable alone as breath-taking. As for the birth-nude female form, he depicts it in such a manner that it is not vulgar, but is simply beautiful. By all means keep Brundage. . . . The covers for June, July, September and January are the best yet. Black or jade backings instill a feeling of bizarreness and grotesqueness."

Some Suggestions

William W. Miller, of Englewood, New Jersey, writes: "I have been a reader of your magazine since its infancy, my acquaintance having been made with the issue which contained Anthony Rud's story entitled *Ooze*, which I believe was back in 1923 or thereabouts, and although I have never written to you before, I have enjoyed reading the Eyrie and feel that it is time for me to express my opinion on matters which have caused controversies recently. As to cover illustrations, I prefer pictures which are gruesomely hor-

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29x5.00-19		2.85	1.05
30x5.00-20		2.85	1.05
28x5.25-19		2.90	1.15
29x5.25-19		2.95	1.15
30x5.25-20		2.95	1.15
31x5.25-21		3.25	1.15
28x5.50-19		3.35	1.15
29x5.50-19		3.35	1.15
30x6.00-19		3.40	1.15
31x6.00-19		3.40	1.15
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33x4½	3.45	1.15
34x4½	3.45	1.15
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rible. (Your early covers were responsible for my buying the magazine.) As to your authors, I admire Seabury Quinn, Edmond Hamilton, Clark Ashton Smith, H. P. Lovecraft, Hugh B. Cave, Robert E. Howard, and several others. I like the interplanetary tales supernatural, scientific, and the Conan stories, but am not interested in the descriptive non-conversational type. . . . I would like to make a suggestion which I believe has not been advanced by anyone in your ranks and files of readers. Here it is: Probably many readers would like to see WEIRD TALES published semi-monthly. Why not put out a mid-month issue, containing one book-length novel (which you have been publishing in serial form) together with several articles on true weird facts or beliefs, an author's page, an article dealing with the lives and deeds of historical sorcerers and workers of black magic, and eliminate all other short stories. Then in the regular monthly edition publish all short stories and eliminate the serials. How will other readers feel about this?" [We will take your suggestions under advisement.—THE EDITOR.]

He Seems to Like Conan

H. J. Ervine, of Coleman, Texas, writes to the Eyrie: "I vote for Robert E. Howard's story, *Shadows in the Moonlight*. I hope Mr. Howard will write more Conan stories. They are great.

Most Popular Story

Black Thirst, that strange story by C. L. Moore, easily won first place as the most popular story in our April issue, as shown by your votes and letters. What is your favorite story in the current issue? Write us a letter or fill out the vote coupon on page 782.

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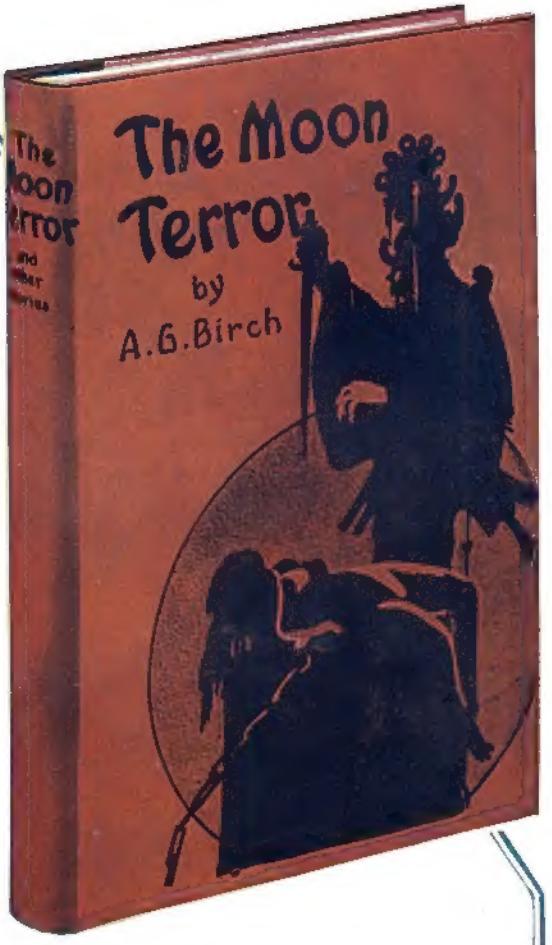

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